

"If the birds refuse to eat someone's body, it means he or she must have been a vicious person."
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A brand new Ghost Street has appeared in the west to satisfy Beijing's late night gourmets.
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"I don't have violent tendencies myself, actually I'm a bit of a coward."
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Theme Parks Face Roller Coaster Ride

By Xiao Rong

A new wave of theme park investment frenzy appears to be hitting China, as two of the world's biggest industry rivals move in for a slice of the country's huge market.

With the signing of a preliminary agreement last December between Universal Parks and Resorts and the Shanghai government, Shanghai Universal Studios Theme Park, the first international-standard theme park in the Chinese mainland, is scheduled to open in 2006.

Meanwhile in January, US entertainment giant Walt Disney International started construction of Hong Kong Disney Park, its third theme park outside America.

Most of China's numerous homegrown theme parks that have been around for more than 10 years, however, are now languishing in various states of neglect.

Hard times

World Paradise, in Pi County near Chengdu, Sichuan province, is just the latest casualty in a string of once-successful theme parks fallen on hard times.

Entrance fees have been cut by almost 50 percent in the past two weeks, while much of the park is under threat of demolition, according to a report in Chengdu's Western City Daily on February 6.

"We have to admit that the park is now facing severe difficulties, with a declining number of visitors," World Paradise board chairman Xie Guoxiang, told *Beijing Today*.

"Our company will hold a meeting of shareholders in the near future to discuss the transformation of our theme park project, which clearly needs upgrading," he said.

Since opening in 1994, World Paradise has seen a total of 6 million visitors. For the first two years, it was the most popular among all the theme parks in the Chengdu area.

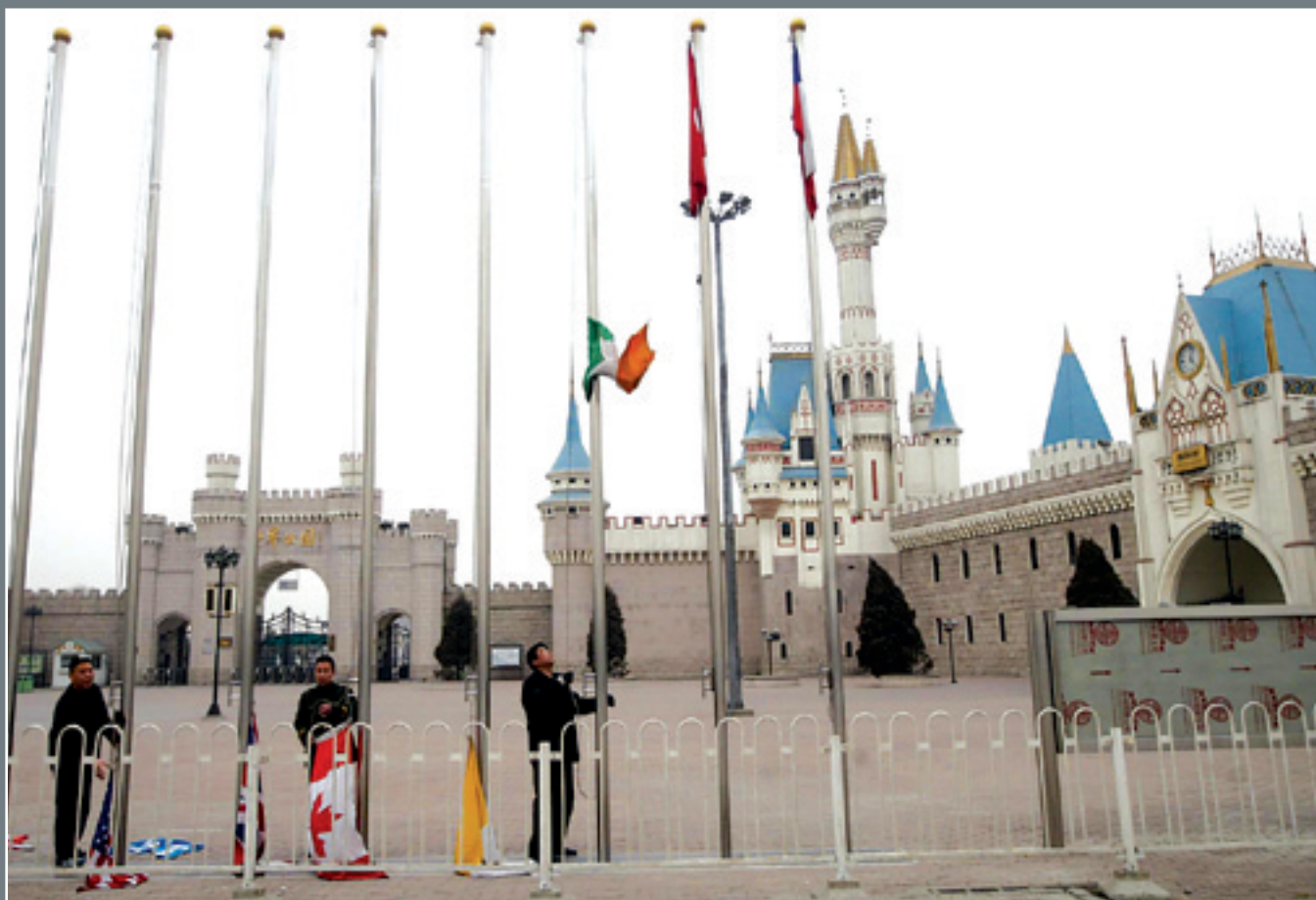
The flow of visitors declined sharply after 1996, says Xie, but he was reluctant to reveal whether the company had gained returns on its initial 438 million yuan investment in the project.

Few survivors

"Among those first round of theme parks built in the late 1980s and early 1990s, few have survived, even after a short period of popularity," says Professor Wu Bihu, director of Beijing University's Center for Recreation and Tourism Research.

Of the over 20 theme parks built in the Shanghai area in the early 1990s, with an investment of more than 100 million yuan each, most have closed their doors, he says.

Wu attributes the failure of most domestic theme parks mainly to the lack of self-owned intellectual property rights in the



Beijing's World Park is one of the many older theme parks around China suffering from poor attendance figures.

Photo by Wei Tong

field of entertainment and tourism facilities.

"Developers and investors need to improve their management of theme parks and avoid simply attempting to replicate foreign theme parks," he stresses.

In the view of Xie Guoxiang, the decline of World Paradise is mainly due to an overemphasis on attempting to recreate world-famous scenic spots, at the expense of neglecting fundamental tourism facilities.

"Chengdu is a city boasting of abundant natural and historical resources, so most visitors come to World Paradise mainly out of curiosity about the artificial spots here," says Xie.

However the company has failed to develop hotels, restaurants and other entertainment facilities to attract more visitors, he maintains.

"It's really important to upgrade the project by sustainable development, which we haven't realized until now," Xie concludes.

Referring to the failure in the 1980s of the string of Journey to the West theme parks, based on the ancient Chinese classic, Fang Zehua of the Beijing Tourism Bureau stresses the importance of innovation in developing new projects.

"Those theme park projects that employ out dated technology, low quality management and

merely imitate the ideas of others, are bound to fail," Fang says.

Originality key to success

Although the majority of those early theme parks failed, some have defied the odds and still attract thousands of visitors, according to Wu Bihu.

A chain of theme parks in south China's Shenzhen, the Dinosaur Park in east China's Changzhou, the Song Dynasty Town in Hangzhou, all continue to thrive.

Among these, the theme park chain in Shenzhen, which includes Splendid China, The Window of the World and China Folk Culture Village, is the most successful.

In Wu's opinion, the success of these theme parks lies mostly in their good market orientation and originality in project management.

"Located in the Pearl River Delta region, China's economic powerhouse, Shenzhen has a unique advantage in attracting visitors both from the mainland and from the Hong Kong region. Such people can afford the high charges levied by the theme parks," Wu says.

Besides a variety of performances for visitors to enjoy while sightseeing, a comprehensive set of facilities ranging from dining, accommodation, and entertainment are also available to maintain the interest of travelers.

Wu predicts that several typical

regional theme parks will flourish in China in the next five to ten years, around Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

"I'm confident in the future success of the Shanghai Universal Studios Park because of the economic advantage of Shanghai and the technological support from Universal Studios," he says.

The proposed park is to be built in the south of the Huangpu Riverbank Development project, near the 2010 World Expo site.

Wu also expresses optimism about the popularity of the Hong Kong Disney Park now under construction.

With the two international-standard theme parks on the way in Shanghai and Hong Kong, Wu says Beijing should now be developing its own regional theme park.

Beijing's tenth five-year tourism plan, in fact, makes special mention of the construction of a comprehensive theme park, which will mainly focus on high technology and folk culture.

"The orientation of high technology is vague, as the use of high technology is a must for the sustainable development of any theme park," says Wu.

He suggests Beijing should combine its rich cultural and historical resources with the promotion of high technology to develop self-owned intellectual property rights in running theme parks.

China must avoid repeating the failures of the first wave of theme park investments, stresses Wu, and develop a series of real regional theme parks in this new round of theme park competition.

New CCTV Channel to Air 24-hour News

By Xiao Rong

China Central Television (CCTV) is to launch the country's first 24-hour news channel, it was revealed this week.

A CCTV spokesperson, who declined to be named, confirmed Tuesday to *Beijing Today* that the station's application to set up the news channel had been approved by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

"The operation plans are still under discussion," said a staff member from the CCTV news center, but refused to reveal further details.

No precise dates have been given as to when the new news channel might go to air.

The news has attracted much attention, from both domestic and overseas media, as it is seen as a sign of further reform in China's increasingly audience-oriented media industry.

"It will be one of the milestones in the evolution of China's journalism," commented Shi Tongyu, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Journalism and Communication.

The establishment of the new channel is a strategic move on the part of CCTV to reorganize its news resources, says Shi, and will greatly push forward the supervision of public opinion.

However he said it was unlikely the new channel would be totally market-oriented, like the US-based CNN.

"CCTV will retain its responsibility as the key national media outlet, and our system makes it impossible to operate in the style of western news channels," says Shi.

One of his worries is that the 24-hour news channel might have difficulty broadcasting around the country, due to local protectionism.

"If this turns out to be the case, we can only rely on the government to guarantee the smooth broadcasting of the programs."

Shi also predicts CCTV will partially transfer some of its prime news programs on other channels, while simultaneously creating new brands.

At present, CCTV operates 12 channels, which cover news and current affairs, the economy, sports, cultural events, movies and other entertainment, as well as English language programs. With its programs reaching over 300 million households, CCTV is China's biggest TV broadcaster.

In a reciprocal arrangement for the transmission of CCTV-9's English language program in the US, the Chinese government last year granted broadcasting rights to two Chinese language channels under AOL Time Warner and News Corporation, but only in restricted areas.

The chief threat to CCTV's 24-hour news channel may still come from the Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV's InfoNews channel, a 24-hour Chinese language news channel that in January was granted approval to air in certain areas of China.

EDITOR: LIU FENG DESIGNER: LI SHI

Sandstorm Scan System in Place

By Ema Ma
Spring is in the air, meaning chirping birds, budding trees and sandstorms are right around the corner.
Though most parts of north China are still under snow, an observation system with stations ranging from satellites to ground-based facilities is already up and running, looking out for any

weather developments that could lead to sandstorms.
“Timing, location, intensity and affected areas of sandstorms will be precisely forecasted four days ahead this spring,” said an unnamed spokesman for the State Environmental Protection Administration in a report run in *Beijing Youth Daily* last Sunday.
The spokesman continued, “There

are no indications that the frequency and severity of sandstorms will weaken this spring, because precipitation this winter in Mongolia and northwest China, the source of the storms, was not above normal. Moreover, seasonal sandstorms will also hit Central and eastern Asia in the near future, as the environmental conditions that lead to the problem - global warming, drought and

desertification - become more serious.”
China’s sandstorm control program has worked with teams from Japan, the Republic of Korea and countries hit by the storms to trace and identify their sources and search for solutions to the problem. Experts from the program have proposed the construction of four ecological barriers between Beijing and Mongolia to decrease sandstorms’ destructive impact.

Textbook Monopoly to be Broken

By Xiao Rong
Primary and middle school students should start paying less for textbooks in the near future, as the state government is launching reforms that will break the monopoly in the textbook publishing and distribution industries.
Following trials of a system for the open bidding for the rights to publish and distribute textbooks conducted last year in the Chongqing, Fujian and Anhui areas, the State Press and Publishing Bureau is considering implementing a similar system nationwide.
Such a reform would overturn long-standing bureau policy that only the People’s Education Publishing House and regional education publishing houses can print primary and middle school textbooks and only Xinhua Bookstores can distribute them.

“By encouraging competition in the publishing and distribution of textbooks, this reform is aimed at reducing the inflated costs of textbooks and reducing the financial burdens of students and their families,” said Liu Binjie, vice director of the bureau.
According to bureau figures, the trials in Chongqing, Fujian and Anhui resulted in an average seven percent reduction in the prices of nine categories of textbooks.

“Our profits from black and white textbooks fell 2.22 million yuan from those of last year because of the trial reform,” said Meng Xiangguang, vice manager of Anhui Xinhua Bookstore Group, which emerged as the sole winner of the trial bidding program in Anhui province.
The Xinhua Bookstore branches in Chongqing and Fujian were the exclusive winners of the bidding in those areas.

Local publishing houses in the trial regions expressed excitement about the reform. “Chongqing Publishing House used to be the only local publisher of textbooks in Chongqing, but now we can compete with them, which will push everyone to improve textbook quality,” said Xie Jinyang, editor-in-chief of the Chongqing University Publishing House, one of the winners of a publishing contract.
While the publishing industry has generally responded in support of the reforms, some people have expressed worries that the moves could lead to fake or unqualified textbooks turning up in classrooms.

“The government’s original purpose of breaking the monopoly is a good idea, but it is also necessary to strengthen supervision of the qualification of companies that participate in the bidding,” said Mr. Chen from the China Publisher’s Association, who declined to give his full name.
A regulation covering the bidding for textbook publishing and distribution rights, which will give specific requirements for the qualifications of bidding participants, will be released this year.



Bailing Out of Baghdad

Last Sunday, Du Genqi (right) and Li Rongjian, staff in China’s Embassy in Iraq, said good-bye to the rest of their colleagues in Baghdad, when a group of embassy employees was transferred to Jordan. Ambassador Zhang Weiqiu will remain in the Iraqi capital.
(Xinhua Photos)

Article Stirs Up Reform Speculation

By Ema Ma
Since it was first published in the *Business Post* last Saturday, the Chinese media has widely cited an article entitled “State Council to be Reshuffled, Seven Committees In the Works”. Based on information from the State Development Planning Commission, State Economic and Trade Commission and other government authorities, the report reveals details of a possible plan for the reform of the State Council.
Such a reshuffling would be the council’s third reorganization, following similar moves in 1988 and 1998. Under the 1998 reforms, the size of the State Council was reduced from 50 to 29 government institutions. According to the *Business Post* article, a new round of reforms, that could kick off in March when the National People’s Congress is held in Beijing, may further trim that number to 21.
Moreover, the new national leadership to be elected in March may set up seven brand-new committees. The chairmen of those committees would be under the direct command of the Premier of the State Council.

If these changes prove true, it will mark the realization of long-floating rumors that the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation and

State Economic and Trade Commission will be combined to form a new Ministry of Commerce. That body would be in charge of supervising domestic and international trade under the conditions of China’s WTO membership.
At the same time, the Ministry of Personnel, Ministry of Civil Affairs and Ministry of Labor and Social Security could be merged into one larger body, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security.

The authority to supervise the 11 trillion yuan of state-owned assets presently scattered between several bureaucratic bodies may be centralized under a new State-owned Asset Committee.
The report continues that the State Development Planning Commission could be expanded and its name changed after merging with the State Council Office for Restructuring the Economic System, the Development Research Center of the State Council and parts of the State Economic and Trade Commission related to investment leading to technology improvement.

Although the Ministry of Agriculture is not currently well geared to deal with the increasing complexity of the domestic agriculture industry, leaders of that ministry seem to be hesitating about pursuing a reform program, according

to the article.
As the administration of energy resources in China is divided among several institutions, scholars have appealed to the State Council for the creation of a state energy committee that would oversee the petroleum, coal, nuclear and water power industries. This kind of unified body is expected to be more effective in dealing with issues of energy safety.
The *Business Post* article also speculated that the Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Communications and Civil Aviation Administration of China could be consolidated into the State Transportation Committee.

A more likely move is making the Banking Regulatory Commission independent from the People’s Bank of China, the country’s central bank. Such a reform would be aimed at allowing the bank to concentrate on the stipulation and execution of monetary policy.
According to the article, the telecommunications industry also faces major reforms, as the central government is considering the establishment of a committee like the US’ Federal Communications Commission that would be in charge of the telecommunications, radio, internet, cable TV and satellite media industries. The Ministry of Information Industry would be affected.

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Education Ministry to Oversee Sino-foreign Schools

By Hou Mingxin
At a press conference held in Beijing last Thursday, the Ministry of Education announced it has set up a special department to administer and protect the interests of Sino-foreign schools and schools for foreign children.
The main task of the special department is to supervise and encourage schools and intermediate education service agencies to become more efficient and create better conditions for their development, according to the ministry’s announcement.
The Chinese mainland has 712 Sino-foreign jointly-run schools, 270 intermediate service agencies for self-supporting students who want to study abroad and 52 schools for foreign children.

In the last few years, many organizations, motivated by huge potential profits, have set up Sino-foreign jointly-run schools or intermediate education service agencies for students who want to study abroad. However, a ministry spokesman said the quality of teaching at some of these schools is far from satisfactory.

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New Book Addresses Olympic Business Opportunities

By Zhao Hongyi
On Tuesday, *Study on Beijing Olympic Economy*, a compilation of detailed analyses of the economic dimensions of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was released.
The idea for the book, which includes contributions from hundreds of economists and scholars, as well as over 30 research institutes and government bodies, was first proposed by Liu Qi, the secretary of the municipal Communist Party Committee.

Articles in the work address the impact of the Olympic Games on the city’s overall construction, growth and structural changes in the city’s service sector and other relevant industries, and in particular, the city’s modernization process.
Only the preface and table of contents of the huge, over-one-million-word book have been translated into English. “We hope a translation of the whole book will be available as early as possible,” said Gu Haibin, a professor at Renmin University and one of the contributors to the book, “because it is truly valuable to enterprises, both domestic and from abroad.”

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Yao Ming to be Registered as Brand

By Hou Mingxin
Consumers can start looking out for official “Yao Ming” products on store shelves in the near future. The Chinese basketball player and star rookie in the US’ National Basketball Association (NBA), is expected to become the namesake of a new brand in the near future, according to a report published in the Guangzhou-based *Yangcheng Evening News* on February 15.
The report continued that in order to make full use and protect the huge market potential of the name Yao Ming, the seven-foot-five-inch tall center’s family decided to register his name as a brand.
A spokesman for the State Administration for Industry and Commerce said the body had received a registration application from Yao’s parents and that the registration process has begun.

That application involved a total of 24 products under nine international classifications.
Ausaid Addresses AIDS in China

By Zhao Hongyi
In an effort to draw attention to a rising health problem, the Australian Embassy, in collaboration with Chinese HIV/AIDS prevention experts, launched the revamped China AIDS Network in Beijing on Wednesday.
“The network will be an information collection center and a platform available to professionals and the public,” said Lydia Morton, Charge d’Affairs of the embassy.

Ausaid, the Australian government’s overseas development aid agency, is the sole financial contributor to the project.
Zhang Konglai, professor at Peking Union Medical College and director of the network created the China AIDS Network with some colleagues in 1994. “Ausaid’s support allowed us to add to the content of our website and create an English version, making it accessible to the rest of the world,” Zhang said at the press conference after the launch.

The address of the new, improved website is: www.china.hivaidinfo.net.



Last Thursday, Chen Tianxu (right), eight-year-old member of the first official group of Chinese tourists to go to Germany, met Peter Emmerich, Chief China Representative for Lufthansa Airlines, in the Beijing Capital International Airport. Since February 15, Chinese citizens have been allowed to travel to Germany for sightseeing. Germany is the first Western European country to admit Chinese tour groups.

KPMG Sued by Chinese Investor

By Ema Ma
In the wake of a string of corporate scandals, the once solid reputations of the “Big Four” multinational accounting firms are being challenged by Chinese investors.

International accounting giant KPMG was sued on February 9 by Xu Qian, an investor in Jinzhou Port, for disclosing misleading information that led to personal losses of \$1,880.

“The case has been accepted by a court in Shenyang, Liaoning Province,” Song Yixin, the lawyer representing Xu, told *Beijing Today*.
He added, “Many other investors in Jinzhou Port have started demanding compensation. The window for taking legal action will be open until October 2004.”

Jinzhou Port, a B-share company (meaning its shares are denominated in Renminbi and traded on the Shanghai or Shenzhen stock exchange with foreign currency) listed on the Shanghai stock exchange in 1998, and was flagged by the Ministry of Finance last September for accounting standards not in accordance with China’s Generally Accepted Accounting Principles. The company subsequently adjusted its financial statements for 1996 to 2000, and disclosed the changes and the penalties it paid

to the ministry to the public.

Since a regulation ordering companies that issue false information in the stock market to pay civil compensation went into effect on February 1, Jinzhou Port is the first B-share company to receive demands for compensation. KPMG’s Beijing and Hong Kong offices, the co-auditors of Jinzhou Port, were the first foreign go-between to be accused of releasing false information by Chinese investors. Other parties targeted in Xu’s lawsuit include Zhang Hongwei, ex-president of Jinzhou Port and GF Securities, the major underwriter of Jinzhou Port’s initial public offering (IPO).

The regulation of February 1 states that investors can bring legal action against a listed company and related intermediate agents based on punishments of those companies imposed by government administrations and judicial authorities.

“We are not in a position to address this issue, as we have not yet received any notice from the court,” said Mr. Yan, a partner at KPMG’s Beijing Office, who declined to give his full name. According to the regulation, KPMG must assume joint responsibility in the case if it cannot prove its innocence of the charges.

Flat Screen Dream

Chinese company acquires flat panel display technology

By Ena Ma

BOE Technology Group announced in Beijing last week the acquisition of Hyundai Display Technology's thin film transistor liquid crystal display business for US \$380 million.

The purchase, which sets a new record for an overseas purchase by a domestic enterprise, makes BOE the only Chinese company with the core technology for thin film transistor liquid crystal displays (TFT-LCD), a pivotal component of flat screen displays.

Wang Dongsheng, chairman and CEO of BOE, said at a press conference his company had taken possession of three TFT manufacturing lines, as well as intangible assets including technology, patents and global sales networks, on January 22.

Big news in South Korea

Although the purchase attracted little attention in the Chinese media, it has been widely covered in South Korea, as Hyundai Display Technology's manufacturing capacities are ranked ninth worldwide for TFT products and the company is a subsidiary of Hyundai Group, South Korea's biggest conglomerate.

According to South Korean media reports, the company, which has been operating in the red, will use the proceeds of the sale to invest in computer memory manufacturing.

When it first went listed on the

Shenzhen Stock Exchange in 1997, BOE was a relatively obscure company ranked No. 99 on China's IT Top 100 in terms of revenue. Although by last year, it had leaped to No. 18 on the list with a revenue increase from 350 million yuan to 5.48 billion yuan, BOE remains largely unknown.

"LCD manufacturers have to bear high risks, as this is absolutely a capital and technology intensive industry," Li Kunyao, president of Au Optronics, the third biggest TFT-LCD manufacturer in the world, said at a ceremony marking the establishment of a joint venture in Suzhou last year.

Au Optronics reported a global loss of \$200 million in 2002, but was saved from bankruptcy by listing on the New York Stock Exchange.

"TFT-LCD companies can easily fall into bankruptcy if the inventory and capital are frozen when the LCD production lines, in which massive amounts are invested, cannot keep up with the latest technology. The transformation from rich to poor takes just a minute," added Li.

Increased liability

In order to make the purchase, BOE had borrowed US \$210 million from Korean banking conglomerate, and the company's liability rate rose to 53 percent after the acquisition. BOE also needs to make massive investments in research and devel-

opment of the fifth generation of TFT-LCD lines, which represent the cutting edge of technology in this field and have already been constructed by Samsung and LG.

BOE now faces a testing time, having to quickly tackle the liquidity and technology bottleneck. If it fails to do so, it will soon become another loser in the ever-changing IT market.

"Acquisition of the advanced technology is the major aim of this purchase. We will be technologically advanced compared with other domestic manufacturers and will become the biggest local supplier in the TFT-LCD market," said BOE's Wang.

Besides PC manufacturers, domestic TV producers are expected to be another major buyer of LCDs. Changhong, ranked No. 12 on the IT Top 100, stated last May that LCD TVs are one of its most important lines. The annual capacity of Changhong's lines currently producing LCD TVs and displays is 500,000 units.

Deputy mayor of Beijing Liu Zhifeng said at a news conference late last year, "We hope BOE will maintain its upward trend and become one of the top three companies on the IT Top 100," in reference to the company's future development.

Market maneuvers

Data from China-TFT.com shows that last year, LCD's accounted for



Wang Dongsheng, chairman and CEO of BOE

less than 10 percent of China's monitor market, however in South Korea, the figure was 65 percent market. China-TFT predicts the global trend away from traditional cathode ray tube to LCDs will see the market share in China increase to 57 percent in 2005 and 88 percent in 2010.

While the three biggest LCD manufacturers, Samsung, LG-Philips and AU Optronics, completed setting up production lines in the Yangtze River Delta region last August and September, China's own brand is yet to make an impact in the world's second biggest PC market. However with an annual capacity of over three million units, BOE's entry into the market will clearly intensify the competition.

The good news for customers is that it is also likely to trigger a new round of price cuts. Before Spring Festival, prices for 15 and 17-inch LCD monitors had fallen by around 30 percent.



A local Coca-Cola employee shows off the new-look Chinese cans. The world No. 1 soft drink manufacturer has redesigned its Chinese logo for the first time in 24 years. (Photos by Bqb)

Geely Hires Former Shanghai Volkswagen General Manager

By Shan Jinliang

As part of its drive to take a 10 percent share of China's auto market, Geely Group, the country's only private car manufacturer, last week replaced its vice president on auto business with former Shanghai Volkswagen general manager Nan Yang.

Nan will be the first among Geely's nine senior managers to have worked for a joint venture. Analysts say his joining Geely has already improved confidence in the automaker's business development.

Long search for talent

Li Shufu, founder and chairman of Geely, invited Nan to join the company late last year, shortly after Nan left Shanghai Volkswagen, according to a report in *Nanfang Daily* on February 16.

Nan has a history of over 20 years in the auto business. From 1990 to 2001, he was general manager of Shanghai Natiifu Transmission Shaft Company, and over that period, the annual sales revenue of the joint venture grew from 20 million yuan to 637 million yuan, earning the company a listing among China's 500 best performing companies. In April 2001, Nan was named the fifth general manager of Shanghai Volkswagen.

According to an official statement from Geely Group, Nan was chosen

because he could use his fruitful auto industry management experience and fine industry image, and is expected to help promote the group's auto business and enhance its industry status and market image.

One of the new leaders

As a private family company, Geely was in the past overseen by Li and his close relatives. But as of a few years ago, the company has been combining training and promotion of existing staff with the introduction of new blood.

In May 2002, former chief accountant Xu Gang of Zhejiang Provincial Local Taxation Bureau became group

CEO. Geely Group shifting of its headquarter from Ningbo to Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province in January was also a way of attracting more capable managers, according to Xu.

A recent press release says the group has introduced dozens of new senior managers in the areas of strategic management, business planning, capital operation and marketing.

No easy task

According to Geely, Nan will be engaged in auto production, research and development and domestic and overseas cooperation, which local media described as the keys to the company's development this year.

According to an article in *Nanfang Daily* late last week, Nan faces a tough task steering the four-year-old Geely toward its stated goal of producing 100,000 cars per year.

However, Geely has already made progress through cooperating with South Korea's Daewoo Group. Geely says it is close to reaching its goal of securing five percent market share this year, as the figure was 4.8 percent in 2002.

At the same time, some analysts have expressed doubt about Nan's ability to help Geely improve its market share, since Nan failed to reverse the fall in Shanghai Volkswagan's auto sales in 2002.

China to Become No. 5 Automaker in 2004

Shanghai GM's new Sail models roll off the production line Wednesday.

ING Group's latest Asia auto market report says China will produce 3.9 million cars in 2003, and the growth rate will be 47 percent in 2004.

The report also predicts China will overtake Canada, Spain and South Korea to become the world's fifth largest auto manufacturer next year. **Xinhua Photo**

Insurance Company Enters Health Provider Market

By Tony Shaw

Following the announcement by New China Life Insurance that it was preparing to establish an independent medical insurance business, the company has reportedly begun selecting sites for its hospitals in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

The news was first reported by *Beijing Morning Post* last Friday, but the company has declined to give further details, other than that the joint venture hospitals will be established in partnership with a US company.

Due to policy restraints, the profit prospect for hospital is difficult to assess, and the Morning Post report concluded that primary business of New China Life Insurance was likely to remain centered on the medical assurance market, rather than deriving profits from running the hospitals.

'Digital China' to Promote Sino-Asia Trade

By Shan Jinliang / Xiao Bin

Digital China was officially launched Sunday at Yabuli, Heilongjiang Province. The non-profit, non-governmental organization will engage in developing high-tech ties with the rest of Asia.

Headquartered in Beijing, Digital China is registered in Hong Kong, and claims more than 20 members to date, which contribute total revenue of around 100 billion yuan. Also on Sunday, UTStarcom president Wu Ying was elected chairman for a one-year term.

Wu said at the opening ceremony that the organization will help enhance high-tech industry cooperation between China and the rest of Asia, and help cut the digital divide between China, Asia and the developed world. He added it will also provide a platform for Chinese entrepreneurs, coordinate the exchanges between entrepreneurs and the government and promote discussion on the Asian digital standard federation.

Seven executive directors were elected, including Wu Ying. The others are GWcom president Victor Wang, Vimicro chairman Deng Zhonghan, AsiaInfo Technologies president James Ding, Ericsson China executive vice president Zhang Xingsheng, Sparkice chairman Zeng Qiang and Merrill Lynch China chairman Liu Erfei.

Lejazz Ties Up with Hualian Nationwide

By Shan Jinliang

Beijing Lejazz, formerly associated with US fast food chain Roasters, announced Monday that it will strengthen cooperation with department store chain Beijing Hualian Shangsha by opening more chain stores alongside Hualian's stores nationwide.

The original Beijing Roasters was introduced to China in 1995, but last June it announced the cancellation of its cooperation with the Roasters, and changed the name of its outlets to Lejazz. To date, Beijing Lejazz has opened seven outlets in Beijing.

General manager Li Fan says his company began cooperating with Beijing Fuchengmen Hualian a year ago, and has now opened branches next to Hualian department stores in Fuchengmen and Anzhenqiao, as well as in Zhengzhou, Henan Province and Hohhot, Inner Mongolia.

Li added that this year, new outlets will be opened next to Hualian departments in Hangzhou, Xiamen, Urumqi and Chongqing, as well as at least two more in Beijing. The manager added that the two sides were developing their business in a complementary way as they aim at the same demographic of 25 to 35 year olds.

Sun Donates Software to Chinese Universities

By Sun Ming

Sun Microsystems, the US-based computer services giant, has donated its Sun ONE network software to 35 top Chinese universities at a ceremony held in Beijing yesterday.

Speaking at the ceremony, Sun's executive vice president of global sales, Robert Youngjohns said, "Sun is fully committed to contributing to information software education among Chinese universities and colleges."

In the past two or three years, all the 35 universities, including Beijing and Tsinghua, have established their own software engineering schools.

According to Sun, the Sun ONE package is "open, integrated, operable across different platforms and with massive upward and downward scalability." The package Sun has donated to the universities, via the Ministry of Education is the education and research and development version.

Vice minister of education Zhou Ji said at the ceremony, "In the higher learning area, what we need most are advanced concepts and software technology which can speed up the development of Chinese software talents and promote China's software growth."

EU Warns Iraq it Faces ‘Last Chance’

Brussels, Belgium, February 18 (AP) — European leaders, trying to end their bitter dispute over Iraq, warned Saddam Hussein on Monday he faced a “last chance” to disarm, but gave no deadline and said UN weapons inspectors must have more time to finish their work.

The statement came at the end of a European Union emergency summit on the crisis with Baghdad. Diplomats insisted they had healed the rift over US calls for military action. But significant divisions remained, with some states saying the United Nations could still disarm Iraq peacefully.

France, which has blocked any swift move to military action, insisted its position had been vindicated and that only the UN Security Council could handle the issue - an implicit rejection of US statements that it has the right to disarm Iraq alone if necessary.

French President Jacques Chirac said France would oppose any effort to draft a new UN resolution authorizing war at this time.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair appeared frustrated by the French stance, saying he did not understand how EU states could agree Iraq was not cooperating fully but not agree Baghdad was in

material breach, or violation, of UN resolutions - grounds for military action.

European parliamentary leaders, who met with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan before he entered the summit, said Annan stressed that he did not want the weapons inspections to go on too long, suggesting the threat of action had to be real to preserve the body’s credibility.

(Barry Renfrew)

Analysts’ Take:

Four Reasons Behind the Objections of France and Germany

Yan Xuetong

France and Germany don’t want an increase of oil prices, because Europe relies heavily on oil imports.

Besides, the US and EU have seen increasing differences in their strategic interests since the Cold War ended.

Thirdly, the EU has a huge number of Arab immigrants who might bring protest and social instability to member countries in the event of war. Neither France nor Germany wants to provoke the Arab populations in their countries.

Europeans also resent Bush’s unilateralism and in this they are gaining massive support around the continent.

(Mr Yan is a professor and director of



Reuters Photos

the Institute of International Affairs, Tsinghua University.)

US Aiming at Europe, Not Iraq

Wang Jian

France and Germany have their reasons to prevent a war by the US against Iraq, because the US is aiming at Europe rather than Iraq.

The Europe-US alliance has broken up since the Cold War ended. The US wants to maintain its superior status over the other powers. A strong dollar helps to maintain its strategic interests. The introduction of

the euro seriously threatens US authority and interests.

The war in Kosovo in 1999, the same year the euro was introduced, damaged investors’ confidence in the euro and left a heavy reconstruction burden for the EU.

An attack against Iraq will affect oil supply to Europe and damage the market’s support for the euro.

(Mr Wang is a professor and researcher in the Chinese Society of Macroeconomics, a think tank of the State Development & Planning Commission)

Hi, Don’t Forget The Toll

The great “C” mark, which stands for tolling, on the road in downtown London was covered by wheel tracks on the first day of use.

To ease the heavy traffic in the metropolitan, the local government started to levy 5 pounds on each vehicle entering the city on February 17.

Xinhua Photo



Russia Eyes Pipeline Projects in Asia

Tokyo, February 12 (Dow Jones Business News) — Russia is very keen to build big pipeline projects in order to boost its oil exports to Asian countries such as Japan and China, a Russian energy official said Wednesday.

“Our oil production will increase steadily through 2005 and 2010, while consumption in Europe won’t rise much,” so we’d like to export the extra barrels to other regions, said Igor Kozin, Director of the Department of Pipeline System Development at Russia’s Ministry of Energy.

Mr. Kozin, who has also held executive positions at Russian oil company Transneft, was speaking at the “Symposium on Pacific Energy Cooperation (SPEC) 2003” in Tokyo.

Russia is currently studying building a large-scale system of trunk pipelines in its eastern regions, which would enable supply of more than 90 million metric tons of crude a year.

Feasibility studies are underway on several routes such as one from Angarsk near Lake Baikal to Nakhodka in the Perovznaya harbor facing the Sea of Japan.

That pipeline could supply an annual 50 million metric tons of crude exports by 2010, Kozin said.

(Kanji Ishibashi)

Russia-China Oil Pipeline Project vs. Japanese Pipeline Initiative

Russia first raised the Russia-China pipeline initiative in 1994. By the end of 2002, the two sides had finished all preparations, and were ready to start construction this year.

The 2400 kilometers long pipeline will run from Angarsk to north-eastern China’s Daqing and is put at \$2.2 billion, with two thirds in Russia and one third in China.

China promised to purchase 20 million tons of oil annually once the line is finished in 2005 and increase to 30 million by 2010. Price will be set based on the average world market prices each year. The total purchasing contract lasts for at least 25 years.

Japan expressed its interest in a separate pipeline last December and offered \$5 billion for the construction of a 4,000 kilometer pipeline from Angarsk to Nakhodka, a Pacific harbour in Russia’s Far East, avoiding a go-through in China.

A compromise agreement reached by Russia’s oil conglomerates and the Ministry of Energy suggests the original pipeline to Daqing will be built as agreed, and Russia will also build a branch pipeline from Chita to Nakhodka for oil exports to Japan and South Korea. Annual export of oil along this pipeline is put at 50 million tons each year.



Analysts’ Take:

Feng Yujun, researcher, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations

Question: When will a final version of the pipeline project come out?

Answer: Russia’s government and parliament will discuss the initiative in March.

It is hard to calculate the final version, because Putin has a number of factors to consider. Also, Russia’s political decision making procedure is not transparent and is heavily influenced by industrial conglomerates.

At a business level, Russia will keep its promise of an annual 20-30 million tons of oil exports to China, which will help greatly with the increasing demand for oil in China.

Q: Why did Japan raise their initiative?

A: It’s understandable Japan wants to diversify its oil import resources for its national security. Japan and Russia are preparing for oil exploration in Sakhalin Island and a pipeline from the island to Japan is under consideration.

China and Russia have prepared for the pipeline for the past eight years. Japan raised their Nakhodka pipeline initiative last December only. We cannot help wondering whether the Japanese raised their proposal from geopolitical, rather than commercial considerations.

Q: Is the initiative practical?

A: No. China and Russia are to start building their pipeline this year, while Japan’s initiative still needs years for feasibility studies.

In the Japanese proposal, \$5 billion is a huge sum to raise. 30 million tons to China and 50 million tons to Japan is also a huge quantity that Russia may not be able to provide.

Q: What lessons can we learn from the fluctuation of the project?

A: It reminds us of the importance of oil supply diversification. China will continue to increase oil import from the Middle East and Central Asia.

Secondly, it’s a reminder of the importance of strategic oil reserves.

Bank Deals May Be Ahead for Citigroup

New York, February 18 (New York Times) - A thirst for deposits could soon send Citigroup shopping for other banks.

The company’s consumer business has been among its most profitable, and expansion is a priority.

Doing deals “is a core competency of Citigroup,” said Marjorie Magner, COO of the group’s consumer business.

Analysts say Citigroup may be interested in deals outside New York, including New England and California, where it controls less than 10 percent of deposits.

(Riva D. Atlas)

Lucent names Russo as chairwoman

Murray Hill, New Jersey, February 19 - Lucent Technologies named president and CEO Patricia Russo as chairwoman of the telecommunications equipment maker.

Russo, 50, retains the CEO title and succeeds Henry Schacht, who is 68 and will remain as an outside member of Lucent’s board overseeing the company’s litigation strategy.

Russo’s promotion comes 13 months after she returned to Lucent after serving as president and chief operating officer of Eastman Kodak. She promised to continue a massive restructuring of the company.

Merrill Lynch Asia-Pacific Chairman Resigns

Hong Kong, February 20 (Reuters) - Merrill Lynch, the world’s largest brokerage, said on Thursday its Asia-Pacific Chairman Check Low has resigned for personal reasons and has been replaced by Raymond Yu, head of the company’s international private client group in Asia.

“It’s a personal decision. He feels the time is right for him to pursue personal and professional interests,” a Merrill spokesman in Hong Kong said.

Investment banks around the region, like their peers in the US and Europe, have been streamlining operations and cutting costs to boost their bottom lines amid weak financial markets.

Qantas Earnings Soar 130 Percent

Sydney, Australia, February 20 (AP) - Australian flag carrier Qantas Airways said Thursday that its first half net profit soared 130 percent to 352.5 million Australian dollars (US\$208 million).

Chief executive Geoff Dixon said the company expects improved profit margins as it converts to coach-class service on leisure routes.

Qantas will reduce flights next month, he said.

The airline will also make employees take voluntary redundancy before June 30, which will effectively cut staff by the equivalent of 1,500 full time employees, without requiring job cuts.

Venezuela Signs No-Violence Pact

Caracas, Venezuela, February 18 (IPS-Inter Press Service) - The government and the opposition in Venezuela signed a joint declaration Tuesday against political violence, under the mediation of the Organization of American States.

In the statement, both sides reject verbal “intemperance,” mutual recriminations, hurtful language and “rhetoric that in any way encourages confrontation.”

The two sides propose instead “a language of mutual respect, tolerance, consideration of others’ ideas, and the supreme appreciation of human life and dignity.”

The second point of Tuesday’s joint declaration states that violence in any form, regardless of who perpetrates it, is “absolutely unjustifiable.”

American Mother Seeks Savior for Chinese Daughter



Kailee Wells and her adopted parents Linda and Owen Wells

By Sun Ming

American lawyer Linda Wells flew to Changde, Hunan Province, from Beijing yesterday in search of a bone marrow donor for her Chinese adopted daughter.

"I understand it is very difficult, and probably unlikely (to find the girl's biological family or another proper match)... but we have to try everything," Wells, 50, told *Beijing Today* before she left for Changde.

Her six-year-old daughter, Kailee, suffers from severe aplastic anemia. Her only chance of living is to receive a bone marrow transplant.

Wells traveled from her home in the US state of New Mexico

to Beijing last weekend with her sister Paige Andre Hodson.

"China gave my daughter life, and now I must ask you to give her life again," Wells said.

Kailee was a robust and healthy one-year-old when Linda and her husband traveled to Changde to bring her to her new home in 1997. At 10 days old, Kailee was found abandoned on the steps of the Teacher's Training Institute in Changde.

"The first four years were perfect in every way. But one day everything changed," Wells said. The day after her fifth birthday in January last year, Kailee was diagnosed with the fatal disease.

Kailee's doctors have searched

bone-marrow registries worldwide, including over eight million potential donors, but have not been able to locate a match. Wells was told the best marrow match is most likely to come from a member of Kailee's biological family or somebody of Chinese ethnic origin.

However, among the over 50,000 samples in the bone marrow bank maintained by the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC), no match has been found.

"Finding the right match will be like looking for a needle in a haystack. But if more people get their blood tested and have their names listed on the registry, the better our chances will be

of making a match," said Hong Junling, deputy director of the Hematopoietic Stem Cell Donor Program Administration Center under the RCSC.

He continued, "We need more donors of blood samples, not only for Kailee, but also for more patients like her. People can donate blood samples at any blood donation center on the street in Beijing."

Readers can get more information on the case or contact the Wells family through the website they created for their daughter, www.kaileegetwells.com. The RCSC can be contacted through their blood donation hotlines at 65126600 and 65594484.

Lucky Lottery Player Reaps Huge Pay Day

By Sun Ming

The lucky holder of two identical lottery tickets, which cost a mere 16 yuan, won 10 million yuan last Friday in Beijing.

Thirty-year-old Mr. Huang, who refused to give his full name, went to the Beijing Sport Lottery Center on Monday and Tuesday, collecting 5 million yuan prizes on both trips.

Huang told a reporter from *Beijing Star Daily* on Monday that, just as he does every week, he chose the seven winning numbers at random. He added he always asks vendors

for two tickets with the same number.

The big winner also admitted to the reporter that he formerly owned a quarry in his hometown and was heavily in debt as a result of going bankrupt.

After paying 2 million yuan in taxes, Huang walked away with 8 million yuan.

According to the Beijing Sport Lottery Center, Huang is the second winner of 10 million yuan in the history of the lottery. The first winner, who also held identical tickets, hit the jackpot in September 2001.

Patient Contests AIDS Test before Stomach Exam

By Sun Ming

A patient at a Beijing hospital is upset after receiving an HIV/AIDS test before undergoing an unrelated examination.

Press coverage of the issue has led to a larger public debate in Beijing, particularly between hospitals and patients, about when such tests are appropriate.

Wu Shui (pseudonym), a local businessman, told *Beijing Today* that he took the unwanted test at the Renmin Hospital on February 8.

Earlier that day, Wu suffered severe stomach pains and went to the hospital. His doctor told him he would need to undergo a gastroscopy, but added Wu would first have to take an HIV/AIDS test.

A gastroscopy is a procedure in which a flexible tube is used to inspect a patient's intestinal tract, including the oesophagus, stomach and duodenum.

Wu immediately started yelling that he saw no need for an HIV/AIDS test. The doctor responded that the test is routine and a mandatory preparation for anyone who is going to receive a gastroscopy. In the end, Wu relented and paid the 40 yuan charge for the test.

"This policy is intended to protect patients' safety," said Wang Jishan, deputy president of the hospital, in a *Beijing Times* report on February 14.

According to Wang, gastroscopy tubes are expensive, so each one needs to be reused many times. All tubes are thoroughly disinfected after each use, but asking patients to undergo HIV/AIDS tests can make the procedure that much safer.

"Forty yuan is no big deal for

most patients. They'll end up spending far more than that if they contract HIV, so it's worth it," he added.

However, the Ministry of Health has passed no regulation requiring HIV/AIDS tests before these procedures.

"As far as I know, only a few hospitals in Beijing have such a requirement," said a Ministry staff member who requested anonymity. "It sounds reasonable on the part of the hospital, but does add to patients' financial burdens."

Yuan Yekuang, an expert from China's Disease Prevention and Control Center, does not think these tests are necessary. "A lot of evidence shows that HIV dies very quickly when exposed to air. And only saliva and gastric juices can actually come in contact with a gastroscopy tube," he said.

"After they are used, gastroscopy tubes are thoroughly cleaned with potent disinfectants. The possibility of infection from a tube cannot be ruled out, but must be extremely rare," said He Jingbin, deputy general manager of the Beijing International SOS Clinic. He added few other countries have similar requirements.

However, Beijing United Family Hospital, the first joint venture foreign hospital in China, also requires patients to receive HIV/AIDS tests before a gastroscopy can be done.

According to Yang Meimei, the hospital's public relations and media coordinator, "In the past, AIDS wasn't taken seriously in China, so few hospitals thought to have such requirements. We think that most hospitals will adopt similar rules sooner or later."

Court Puts Price on Head of Debtor

By Chen Ying

The Xicheng District People's Court issued a bulletin on the Internet last week, offering a reward of 30,000 yuan to anyone who provides information leading to the capture of a person the court has judged guilty of defaulting on personal loans.

This is the first time for a court in the capital to take such a measure in dealing with a case of failure to repay personal debt.

The notice, put out on the Beijing Courts website (www.bjcgf.gov.cn), explains the case. Wei Bing, a 34-year-old local woman, owes 168,000 yuan to the Beijing Zhongyuan Kuaijie Airline Agency Center. The center sued Wei for failing to repay her debts in early 2001. After mediation, Wei agreed to pay the money, but the center has yet to receive one yuan.

In following up on the case, the Xicheng court made efforts to locate Wei, only to find she has disappeared. Thus the court decided to broadcast the on-line bulletin.

The bulletin reads that anyone who provides correct information on Wei's whereabouts or her current financial status is entitled to 15 percent of the money the center ends up receiving. A person who provides information on both matters will take home 20 percent of the money.

"Issuing reward bulletins and publishing detailed information on the identity of debtors on the Internet are useful means not only of getting clues, but also of scaring other people in debt into paying up," said Yang Pingsheng, the presiding judge in the court's enforcement department.

Waitress Murdered by Desperate Man

By Su Wei

Tragedy struck the city on Valentine's Day when Jiang Guozhen, 27, a farmer from Heilongjiang Province, murdered a waitress at a karaoke hall and injured three other employees.

He is currently being held in detention at the Fengtai Branch of the Beijing Public Security Bureau.

Jiang told the police he committed the crime after flying into a rage after the waitress refused his demands to have sex. In 2001, his wife deserted him after two years of marriage because of his sexual dysfunction.

He arrived in Beijing on February 13, planning to commit suicide the next day, his birthday. "Once I decided to come to Beijing, I knew I'd never return alive to my hometown. But, I wanted to have sex one last time before I died," he confessed to the police.

Last Thursday evening, he took some medicine to spur his sexual function and walked into the karaoke hall near Liuliqiao in Fengtai.

"I spent 1,200 yuan there. The waitress sat with me in the room, just singing and drinking with me. She absolutely refused to have sex with me no matter what I said," he told the police.

In his confession, Jiang continued, "if the waitress had just agreed to my demands, I would not have killed her."

On the following evening at around 8 pm, he returned to the karaoke hall armed with a knife. He asked for the same waitress to entertain him.

Four hours later, under cover of the loud music blasting from the disco section of the hall, he stabbed the woman ten times in the chest, killing her. While trying to flee the scene, he also stabbed three waiters who tried to stop him after they heard the woman's screams.

Other waiters and customers then chased Jiang, some throwing wood planks. Several planks connected, hitting him on the head, shoulders and back and knocking him unconscious. He was arrested on the grounds of club when the police arrived at the scene.

"He is likely to be sentenced to death," said an unnamed spokesman from the Fengtai police.



A model of the Temple of Heaven by Xu Yanfeng

Photo by Xu Zhuo

Folk Artist Faces Medical Crisis

By Chen Ying

A Chinese folk artist may never be able to realize his creative vision if he does not find enough money to pay for treatment of the kidney failure endangering his life.

Xu Yanfeng, 51, an artist and farmer from Yongqing County, Hebei Province, has stayed in the Beijing No. 6 Hospital nearly two months receiving treatment and awaiting a kidney transplant. Without outside financial assistance enabling him to receive the operation, he is likely to die within one year.

For the past forty years, Xu has been working on an art form he personally created — making architectural models from sorghum stalks. At the age of 14, he started his first major work, a detailed replica of Tian'anmen Square that took him three years and seven months to complete. His pieces have ended up in the collections of museums within China and abroad. Since the early 1980s, he has won many awards, including the title of "folk industrial artist" from UNESCO and the Chinese Folk Artists' Association in 1996.

Xu's health struggles started last autumn when the lower parts of his legs became swollen. At the local hospital, he was diagnosed with nephritis, a kidney disease, though treatment was ineffective and his condition deteriorated one month later.

Accompanied by his wife, Sun Shufen, Xu went to Langfang Hospital in Hebei on December 18. Doctors gave him an ultrasonic inspection and determined he was suffering from kidney failure.

The couple went to Beijing the next day to get a second opinion. Xu ended up checking into the No.

6 Hospital, where he has been undergoing the torture of dialysis for several weeks. During his first two weeks in the hospital he received the uncomfortable treatment three times a week, but because each session costs 462 yuan, he decided to scale down to twice a week.

"The doctor told me that it will cost about 180,000 yuan to get the kidney transplant I need," Xu told *Beijing Today*. However, the couple already has spent all but 6,000 yuan of their savings on his treatment.

Sun said, "In order for my husband to stay in the hospital and get treatment, we have borrowed a lot of money from our relatives." By February 16, they had already paid 18,300 yuan, but if they do not turn over another 10,000 yuan this week, the hospital will stop Xu's treatment.

To save money, Sun sleeps on the floor in Xu's ward. "It costs just 1 yuan to sleep there," she said. Be-

tween them, the couple only eats one bowl of porridge and some steamed bread for dinner. "I buy some *baozi* (steamed buns) with pickles for lunch," Sun added.

In the past, Xu sold some of his smaller works to raise money to support his family. "But I never want to sell my large-scale pieces," Xu insisted. Instead, he hopes to contribute them to museums, or ideally to display them in a museum of his own if he is able to afford it some day.

Unfortunately, chances of that dream coming true are fading by the day. "To pay for the treatment he so desperately needs, we will have to sell some of his artworks," said Sun. "If he survives, of course, he'll be able to create some new pieces."



Xu Yanfeng

Photo by Chen Ying



Photo by Li Wei

A Bunny with Bite

By Lily Li

Chen Shaotong, 8, is happy to tell anyone about her pet rabbit's unusual teeth — the otherwise normal bunny has two tiny tusks.

The teeth are actually just overgrown incisors. "We don't know what happened. About two months ago, the rabbit's teeth began to grow out from its mouth, and they just keep getting longer," said Cao Tiemin, Chen's grandfather.

He added the family has never fed their pet anything out of the ordinary except for a tonic that contains calcium.

The one-year-old rabbit's incisors now measure four-centimeters-long, but Cao says they do not hinder the bunny from enjoying its favorite foods, cabbage and radishes.

Voice Update

Whose Culture is it?

By Chen Ying / Miao Yajie

A letter from Egypt to *Beijing Today* this week shows that China is not alone in its desire to recover the many artworks taken overseas over the centuries, especially those taken by theft or looting.

In his letter to *Beijing Today*, Dr. Zahi Hawass, secretary general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, says Egypt intends to recover all of its artworks taken abroad by illegal means.

Should artworks taken overseas be returned? It is a vexing problem between the current owners of the artworks and the countries of origin. The issue came to the public eye again two months ago when a declaration was issued by 19 international museums and institutions saying that it would be improper to return ancient overseas artworks to their original countries. *Beijing Today* reported the story on January 17.

The Egyptian government issued its own declaration recently to worldwide museums and institutions, warning them against dealing with people who had acquired artworks illegally.

Meanwhile, the museums which have collected so many artworks from other countries remain unwilling to return them. To answer the Greek government — which wants to borrow the famous "Parthenon Sculptures" so that visitors to the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens can see them — Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, insisted that "the British Museum is the best possible place for the sculptures from the Parthenon in its collections to be on display".

To protect cultural property, UNESCO enacted the *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* in 1970. But many countries feel this is not enough. The convention only applies post-1970 and does not affect transfers of cul-

tural property that took place before. There are few international regulations relating to whether present owners should return cultural property they acquired centuries ago.

But the original owners have their own stance. "Most countries ratified the UN convention, which means they admit it is totally wrong to keep artworks acquired by illegal means. If they still keep artworks in their own museums which came to them under dubious circumstances centuries ago, they are contradicting the spirit of the convention," said Zhao Hong, assistant to the director of China's Lost Cultural Relics Recovery Program.

Beijing today interviewed some of the interested parties in this case. Opinions follow:

'Egypt intends to recover all of its artworks taken abroad by illegal means.'

— Zahi Hawass, secretary general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities

It's a complicated issue, requiring great patience and wisdom.

Many countries which have ancient civilizations, such as Egypt, China, India, Iran, Iraq, and countries in Africa, Asia Minor and Latin America have experienced the systematic looting of their artworks over recent centuries. It's mainly because these countries and areas were colonized. They lost sovereignty and the ability to prevent the export of their own artworks.

UNESCO, which represents world culture, has made great efforts in this area. It has spent the last three decades grappling with the problem. But those countries which removed artworks from overseas still refuse to return them to their original countries, because their laws rule that the artworks are now their assets.

Egypt has faced big problems in this case. Many of its artworks were exported as gifts or through smuggling prior to the



Beijing Today's January 17 article

July Revolution in 1952.

So now, Egypt mainly focuses on recovering artworks taken abroad illegally, whether they were taken from treasure-houses, museums, temples, tombs or mosques.

Egypt has tried all kinds of diplomatic and legal methods to recover its artworks. The museums and the national treasury have compiled extensive records about the artworks. The government has already had some success in recovering cultural property from the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and the US. The government is optimistic it can make further progress on this issue.

'As far as conservation is concerned, China knows better how to protect its own artworks than the west.'

— Lo Ch'ing, Professor of the Art Department at Taiwan Normal University

I think that the exhibition of Chinese national treasures in western museums will help Chinese culture permeate into the non-Chinese world. This is very important. These countries are conducting cultural education for us with their budget.

It is not necessary for the Chinese government to get involved in the act of claiming the articles back. However, individual collectors can do whatever they think

is proper.

We Chinese feel that spending ridiculous sums to buy 19th century impressionist paintings is absurd. But after being properly selective, it would be good to buy back the most important items in Chinese Art History. The major museums in China should do this both cautiously and aggressively.

It is a wide spread fallacy to consider that Chinese treasures are better off on display in western museums. The appalling mistake early in the last century by the British Museum when they cut up and separated the Admonition Scroll by Ku Kai-chih "女史箴图卷" into "pork chops" has become an international joke, a very bitter one indeed. We cannot let this kind of stupidity happen again.

'Our many millions of visitors, both to the Museum itself and now to our website, come from all over the world.'

— Andrew Hamilton, Press Office spokesman for the British Museum

It is essential for China to play its role on the world stage and Chinese art and antiquities should be displayed alongside the great art of other nations. How else could the world understand that China invented porcelain and printing, or that China has a tradition of painting which stretches back more than 2,000 years.

The British Museum is a universal museum. China is justifiably proud of her long heritage, and ought also to be proud of the scholarship which takes place all around the world on her history, which is show-cased as nowhere else in the British Museum for 5 million visitors every year from all around the world to see and admire.

The British Museum's Acquisitions Policy abides by the UNESCO 1970 agreement and the Codes of Ethics of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and Britain's Museums Association. The policy of the Museum is to refuse to acquire

objects that have been illegally excavated and/or exported from their country of origin since the date of the UNESCO agreement of 1970.

The British Museum is governed by an Act of Parliament, and the museum's trustees hold its collection of objects from the world's greatest civilizations in trust for the whole world, not just Britain.

Worldwide opinions vary on the question of whether objects in museums should be returned to their country or region of origin. Many countries take the view that the presence of displays of their historical cultures in the world's great universal museums, such as the British Museum, can play an important role in bringing knowledge and understanding of their importance to a worldwide audience.

This view can lead to close and co-operative cultural links between countries and their museums across the world, such as exist between the British Museum and many museums in China, from which all participants can learn and benefit.

Many countries also recognize that museums have played a vital role in preserving many fragile and important artifacts from their past which otherwise might have been lost.

Some people argue that under the conditions of the modern world museums should send back objects in their collections to the countries from which they originally came. The British Museum believes that in the world of globalization, international travel, and the information society, we need global museums to reflect the totality of human history and culture, as well as national museums devoted to the culture and history of a particular people or country.

The British Museum is just such a place. Here the visitor can compare the glories of Chinese culture and civilization with ancient Greece, Mexico, Rome, and Africa, all under one roof and free of entry charge. This is a museum of the world for the world.

By Lily Li

He was expecting to be asked something like "Do you promise to live with her according to God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony?" But the questions in China's new marriage vow procedure were rather more penetrating.

Mr. Hou, a 45-year-old groom, came to Hangzhou Marriage Registry Office to get approval for his second marriage on January 8 and had to stand before a clerk and answer the question "Can you fulfill the duties of the one-child-planning policy?"

Mr. Hou felt embarrassed because he hadn't considered having any children after the age of forty. And the questions didn't end there. "Are you getting married out of your own free will? Are you confident in the status of your new marriage? Do you accept the responsibilities of comforting each other?" The questions are binding too. Say no, and that's it,

Wedding Vows in a Registry Office?

Hangzhou refuses to give people marriage certificates if they don't take the oath

no marriage.

Mr. Hou blushed and said, "We don't need this wedding vow procedure, can't we just sign the paper?" He was willing to pay the fee of 130 yuan for this "service" but the clerk said he couldn't get the marriage certificate if he didn't speak the vows.

Hangzhou has just implemented the new registry office regulations already instituted in

Shanghai, Shenzhen, Wuxi and Beijing as of September 2001. The new regulations require the somewhat more detailed vows but Hangzhou is the only city which has made them binding and which is charging for the service. Mr. Hou was one of hundreds of people in Hangzhou who complained about the new procedure.

Shenzhen city has adopted a

procedure with rather more inspiring statements such as "we wish to live together, respecting and helping each other. We believe we can conquer any difficulties, and happiness will always be on our side." This system has proved more popular than the drier vows required in Hangzhou. According to statistics of the Marriage Registry Offices in Shenzhen, more than ninety percent of couples have been happy to speak these vows, a far more positive reaction than in other cities.

"This new system was set up to add color to the dull registry procedure and make newlyweds aware of their moral and legal responsibilities," said Gao Hongwei, section chief in Shanghai Civil Administration Bureau.

A survey on www.etang.com last September revealed that 36% of interviewees think speaking wedding vows is entirely unnecessary because marriage is a matter for the couple to decide on. 28% felt that making such vows in an office seemed strange and uncomfortable. Only 17% were in favor, saying taking vows were a positive measure that would remind people of the im-

portance of marriage.

da. These demands are not being met, and Turkey is constantly being expected to make compromises."

— Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of Turkey's ruling party, said after a Cabinet meeting that there had been "no positive" outcome in negotiations with the United States. With Washington warning that time is running short, the United States and Turkey failed again Wednesday to agree on a plan to let US forces deploy for a northern front against Iraq. The standoff came as US ships loaded with tanks and other armor awaited orders in the Mediterranean.

By Sun Chen

SOUND BITES

"The occupation of a teacher is far more stable than that of a 'white collar' worker."

— Chen Zhuofen, who will graduate from Shanghai International Studies University this July, signed a one-year contract as a counselor with her university, turning down job possibilities in foreign enterprises.

"Of course our foreign friends can think that the renminbi's exchange rate needs to be raised. We, however, see no need for this."

— China's Finance Minister

Xiang Huaicheng has defended the value of the yuan against calls for a revaluation, arguing the impact of the currency on the Japan and US economies has been overstated.

"Everything is gone. You can't recognize the people inside. It is all black and gray."

— Sung Bo-hun, who was inside the subway in Taegu, South Korea on Tuesday when flames and smoke engulfed two crowded subway trains following an arson attack, killing 126 people.

"Turkey's demands have to be met. Only then can we put the authorization on the agen-

portance of marriage.

Should it be necessary to speak wedding vows in the registry office? Does this procedure belong only in western countries and should it be held only in churches? Do people feel comfortable when they speak the vows in front of a government official instead of a priest? Opinions follow:

Wang Juping, lawyer of Guoxin Law Office in Guangdong Province

I think this measure violates the basic rules of marriage law in China which has adopted the style of registry marriage which means signing successfully starts a marriage. Only countries performing religious ceremonies take wedding vows as a necessary procedure because they have a deep cultural basis for this custom. Also, isn't it ridiculous that people should be asked if they can accept the duties and responsibilities of love by a government employee instead of a priest!

If lovers really want such a procedure for their marriage, they can have it as part of their wedding party. Forcing every couple to take oaths in the registry office is nothing but an attempt to get more money from the service.

If marriage registry departments can reduce troublesome procedures and speed up the progress of sending certificates, it would be a real blessing for newlywed couples.

Hu Lüyin, associate professor, Law School of Yangzhou University, scholar in civil law

Registry Day is the legal wedding day, but it's not commonly accepted as such by couples and their relatives. Introducing this

vowing procedure is a good way to change people's old-fashioned conceptions, the most serious of which is that only the wedding dinner party seals a marriage.

The style of "three matchmakers and six witnesses" in Chinese traditional wedding ceremonies is also a kind of wedding vow, so we can't say this is just a western phenomenon.

But I think it's wrong for Hangzhou registry offices to compel people to take these vows and charge them for the service. Not everyone likes to express their feelings in public and this puts a lot of pressure on them.

Lin Jie, saleswoman in Beijing Sogo Department Store

It's good to make this kind of promise at the beginning of a marriage. Registering is as simple as receiving a package from the post office. At the end of getting the certificate, my husband asked what other procedures there were and the clerk just waved his hand and said, "It's OK." What a disappointment!

Such vows can create a solemn atmosphere in the wedding ceremony. I think it's okay to introduce some parts of traditional western wedding ceremonies to Chinese weddings.

Bidhan Chandra, American teacher of EMBA class in Renmin University of China

People in America are used to reading sentences like "love and cherish, till death do us part" sincerely in their wedding ceremonies, these are wedding vows. I don't think questions and answers are vows because they are not jumping from people's hearts, but from the lines of the documents.

By Su Wei

Non-payment of debts by overseas clients has long been a problem for Chinese exporters, with total debts owed reaching up to US\$10 billion a year. But there are signs the problem is growing worse. Last year, from goods China had exported worth around US\$294 billion, the unpaid debts jumped to US\$15 billion.

"Even for the best performing domestic companies, such debts account for around five percent of the total annual value of their exports, much higher than the average level in western countries where it's between 0.25 and 0.5 percent," says Han Jiaping, general manager of CreditCN Business Consulting, a company which specializes in recovering unpaid debts. "In some domestic companies the percentage rises to 30 percent."

Hard to get the money back

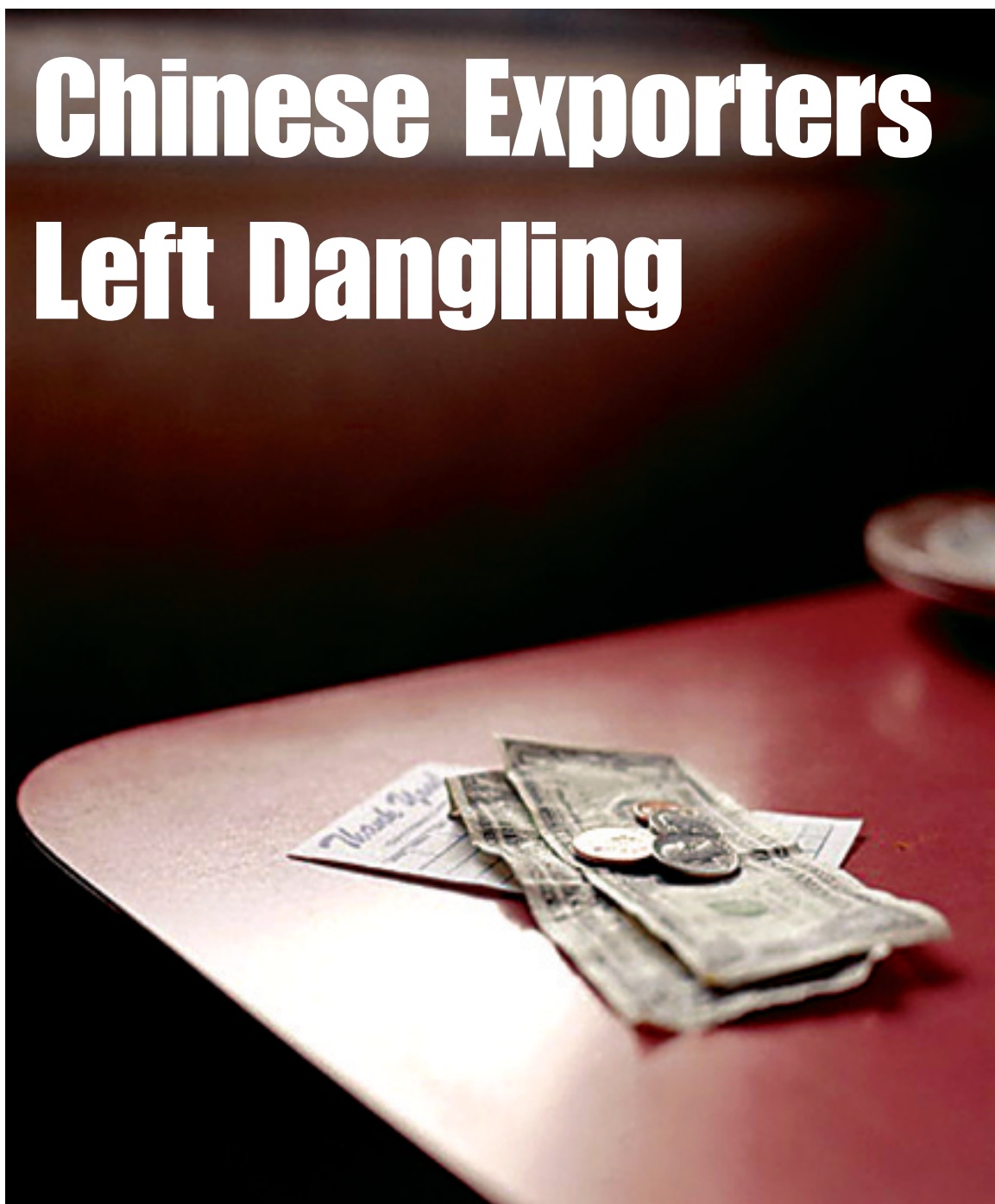
Han says his company was the first in China to start helping domestic enterprises get the money they were owed by overseas clients. It's dealt with over 700 cases in the past decade, with total overdue payments of around US\$300 million. "We succeeded in getting back just over US\$30 million," he says. "And the number of companies with this problem is rising. It's much higher now than in the early 1990s."

Sang Bingqin of Oriental Factors, another domestic company which has been recovering overdue payments since 1994, says his company deals with more than 100 cases every year. Only in around 30 of those cases are they successful in getting the money. "What we get back is just part of the amount owed. And you can forget about interest. We just try to reduce companies' losses as much as possible. But sometimes it's impossible," she explains.

How does it happen?

The overseas companies investigated by these two consulting companies are usually small ones opened by people with Chinese origins, especially from Hong Kong or Macau. "They get to know their Chinese business partners through their relatives or friends in China's mainland," says Han.

"I never thought that they would cheat us and refuse to pay the due amount," says a textile factory boss in Shandong, who requested to be unnamed. "My client was an American Chinese. I got to know him through his relative, a civil servant in Yantai, Shandong Province." He recalls that the client impressed him at the first meeting. "We had a pleasant dinner and in the following few months the business was conducted smoothly. We got the payment without any delay."



He says that even when the client increased the order to around US\$20,000 he never doubted the money would be paid. But this time the American company didn't pay up after the goods were delivered. After over one year of trying to get the money back through asking the relative to contact the American company and keeping on calling the company, the textile factory gave up and sought help from CreditCN Business Consulting which found the overseas company had transferred all the profits to pay its loans in America and was facing bankruptcy.

Lack of credit awareness

A degree of commercial naivety is partly to blame for this situation. Sixty percent of the domestic companies handled by CreditCN Business Consulting had never conducted any credit investigation of overseas companies before signing a deal with them.

Han says most domestic companies establish a business relationship simply by looking at the name cards of the representatives from the overseas com-

panies and listening to their introduction. "They seldom think about how reliable their words are," says Han. "Even when they visit the overseas companies to check them out they can hardly find anything questionable as they don't know how to investigate the credibility of these companies. What they find is always the same — a company with dozens of busy people in an apartment in a high building."

Sang says it seems that most of the domestic companies follow their intuition in choosing their overseas partners. Sang mentioned a domestic company which struck up a partnership with a client in Hong Kong (whose names she declined to give). The domestic company provided goods worth US\$200,000 but was never paid. When Oriental Factors was asked to investigate, it found the registered capital of the Hong Kong company was only 10 Hong Kong dollars. Fortunately it was a public listed company which made it easier for the domestic company to get back some of its money. The pres-

ident of the domestic company said from then on he would pay for a credit investigation into any new overseas partners.

Sang says most domestic companies want to avoid the expense of a credit investigation. "Chinese companies tend to think it is a waste of money to take this precaution until they actually suffer. They don't think it is likely they will be cheated and sometimes they have no idea how to record the expense of a credit investigation in their accounts."

Simple mistake

Sang says a surprising number of the domestic companies are eager to enlarge their profits through exports in the mistaken belief that the government is still operating its policy of encouraging exports by offering financial rewards to exporters. This policy expired in the mid-1990s.

The government does still offer a tax rebate for exporters. "The tax rebate for agricultural products is around three percent and for chemical products it's more than 10 percent," says Sang. "In order to benefit from

the rebate, domestic companies, especially private ones which receive no government support, are eager to export more."

Han says he has noticed that most private companies are used to conducting their business through sales staff. "The more business they get, the more the sales people earn." But few of the sales staff have any professional knowledge of credit investigation or any idea how to get overdue money paid, "though they may be good at selling products."

He says the most common way for these domestic companies to get the money they're owed is to ask the sales staff to handle it. "How are they supposed to do it? All they can do is keep on calling the overseas companies. If they fail to get the money back, they either resign or are sacked by the company. But this doesn't take care of the problem."

Unclear contracts

Sang says around 33 percent of the cases involving unpaid money are caused by disputes over the contract, such as the quality of the products or the method of payment.

A Guangdong textile company exported 100,000 items of children's clothes to a Hong Kong clothing company in April 1998. One month later the Hong Kong company decided to import half of the previous amount. After negotiating with the Guangdong company, the ordered amount was agreed to be 60,000 items. But a formal contract was not signed to that effect so the Guangdong company still delivered 100,000 items only for the Hong Kong company to refuse to pay for all of it. The Guangdong company did not get the due two million Hong Kong dollars till one and a half years later, with the help of the commercial trade union in Hong Kong.

Han says he just helped a Zhejiang handicraft company get back over US\$20,000, 70 percent of the amount owed, from a South Korean company. "The South Korean company alleged that the quality of the handicrafts did not meet their requirements," he says. That may have been true, but he says overseas companies sometimes treat quality as an excuse for not paying the due amount.

Cultural factors

Han says Chinese people have long been educated that they should trust people. They also seem to believe that overseas businessmen are more respectable. "Even some of the domestic companies which feel it would be a good idea to check the credit of overseas companies will easily desert this idea and blame themselves for not showing due loyalty to their business partners."

In a case handled by Oriental Factors in 2000, a domestic tire

production company had not received US\$200,000 from a contract worth a total of US\$280,000 from its long-term business partner in the Philippines. The company said it was aware profits were low for tires sold in the Philippines but it believed there would not be a problem, "since they were our long term business partners." They considered the 10-year long partnership as a kind of implicit guarantee.

Oriental Factors found the company in the Philippines had been on the brink of bankruptcy for a while and all the staff had left except the chairman. Oriental Factors says nearly 80 percent of the cases they handled in 2000 were caused by deteriorated credit of long-term overseas business partners.

Companies' efforts less effective

CreditCN Business Consulting and Oriental Factors share the opinion that once the best period for recovering unpaid money has passed, it is extremely hard to get anything.

Sang says the first six months after payment was due is the best period to get the money back. "In that time we have a success rate of around 60 percent."

"Although we promise that there's no commission without success, some of the domestic companies are still unwilling to ask us to get their money until they decide there is no hope of getting it themselves," says Sang.

Unfortunately, domestic companies tend not to be that successful in getting their money back. She says most domestic companies also treat legal proceedings as a last resort due to the long period involved and the high fees.

A domestic clothing company lost all the money it was owed due to its hesitation in seeking help from special management companies such as Oriental Factors and CreditCN Business Consulting. "Just four months before we decided to seek such professional help, the American company moved and we lost contact with them," says the president of the company, who declined to give his name. "If we had decided earlier, we would probably have got our money."

Problem set to increase

Chen Hongliang, Doctor of International Trade at the University of International Economics and Business says, "The Chinese government promised that within three years of entry to the WTO, all domestic companies would have autonomy in imports and exports. This freedom to export as much as they want means the problem of unpaid money could soon increase dramatically if nothing is done to prevent it."

Photo / Tony Stone

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Migrant workers in Guangzhou wear masks to protect against the mystery illness.

Photo by Photocom

In a Funk Over Flu

By Ivy Zhang

Roche, the international pharmaceutical giant based in Switzerland, has been accused by a local newspaper in Guangdong of spreading false information to profit from the recent outbreak of a mystery illness in the region by boosting sales of its products. The newspaper, *Southern Metropolitan Daily*, claims Roche spread the rumor that the illness was chicken flu and that its product Tamiflu was the only cure. It reported the case to the police last Friday and Guangdong Public Security Bureau is now investigating. The mystery illness first emerged last November. A total of 305 cases have been identified and five people died from it. Chinese authorities confirmed this Wednesday that it was a strain of pneumonia caused by a virus named chlamydiae and that can be spread through people or birds. The disease is now largely under control.

Rumor going around

The start of the "scandal" was a press conference held by Shanghai Roche Pharmacy on February 9 at Guangzhou Holiday Inn City Center. *Southern Metropolitan Daily* says that at this conference, the media was told that "based on the symptoms, the disease in Guangdong is much like the chicken flu that broke out in Hong Kong in 1997". Roche said stocks of its product Tamiflu, a medicine for flu, were running low in Guangzhou. "Before and after that meeting, sales representatives of Roche visited big hospitals in Guangzhou to promote Tamiflu, saying it could cure chicken flu," according to the paper's report. Coincidentally, a message saying, "the pneumonia virus in Guangdong is chicken flu B-2 which can be treated by Tamiflu" began to spread among websites and mobile phones in Guangzhou at the same time. "People who didn't know what to do about the disease finally found a solution," the paper reported. As a result, demand for Tamiflu rocketed. Chen Qi, product manager of Roche, told the paper that more than 80 hospitals in Guangdong had made emergency orders for Tamiflu and Roche had shipped 105,000 boxes of it to Guangdong by February 13. "Demand increased 100 times in a few days," the paper says. "Wherever the rumor came from, Tamiflu was the one big winner in the whole incident."



Southern Metropolitan Daily ran a series of stories on Roche's "scandal".

"Demand increased 100 times in a few days."
"Wherever the rumor came from, Tamiflu was the one big winner in the whole incident."
— Southern Metropolitan Daily

The paper reported that there were "amazing similarities" between the handouts distributed at the press conference, Roche sales representatives' promotion of the medicine and the messages on the Internet and mobile phones. But the paper reminded readers of the fact that it had not been proved that the disease was chicken flu and it also claimed that even if it was, Tamiflu could not cure it. The rumor had a huge impact, particularly on the poultry industry. People stopped buying chickens and poultry dishes at restaurants suddenly became less popular. Huo Di, head of Foshan City Agriculture Bureau, said sales of chickens had declined 30% since February 8 in the markets of Foshan. The paper concluded Roche had been "spreading false information and taking advantage of people's unease to make huge profits."

Roche fights back
Roche has rejected the accusation. In a statement faxed to *Beijing Today* from Shanghai Roche Pharmaceuticals this Wednesday, the company complained the newspaper's report was inaccurate and unfair. "The report is quite different from the truth," says the statement. "It names a well known international company and

makes assumptions about it. This is irresponsible behavior. As a media outlet, the paper should be more careful before the facts are clear." Roche said the reports misled readers and had done great damage to Roche's reputation. "Roche is shocked and will reserve the right to pursue legal avenues," it stated. The statement also clarified some points in the Tamiflu case, excerpts are below. □ Before the Spring Festival (February 1), Tamiflu was out of stock in Guangzhou. Then came the informal breakfast meeting with Guangzhou media. □ There is no evidence that Roche had any connection with the messages on websites and mobile phones. □ As for making profits from this, the amount concerned is tiny. The trade price of 100,000 boxes of Tamiflu accounts for just 0.5% of the total sales volume of Shanghai Roche. □ It is sales representatives' job to go to hospitals introducing Tamiflu. As for sales of Roche products in China in the wake of the incident, it states, "so far, the sales of Roche have not suffered, thanks to the quality and efficacy of our products." Roche said it would cooperate fully with the authorities' investigation.

Guilty or not?
Southern Metropolitan Daily faxed two handouts to *Beijing Today* which they claimed to have received at the Roche press conference. One of the handouts does mention casualties from the influenza virus.

The handout also says that after hearing about the disease, Professor Guo Yuanji, technical adviser at the China National Influenza Center, "suspected it might be chicken flu, given the high death rate." *Beijing Today* called Guo at the number indicated in the handout. "They are quoting me out of context," Guo said. "A marketing director of Roche did call me. We talked a lot but I never went to Guangdong and I have no detailed reports about the disease." On the other handout, under a sub-head about Tamiflu's efficacy in treating influenza, it claims the medicine can treat "chicken flu virus H5N1 and H9N2." "The reports accused Roche of exaggerating its product's effects," said Xiao Aigen, director of the Supervision Division of Guangdong Drug Administration. "But we don't know whether that is true or not. If yes and they did violate regulations, we'll enforce Chinese Medicine Law." Liu Yanqiong, buyer of Guangzhou Drug Corporation, told *Beijing Today* Roche has three or four distributors in Guangdong. Her company is one of them. "We began to buy in Tamiflu at the request of hospitals since last May or June. We usually get requests for 200 to 400 boxes per month. But the figure shot up around February 1," Liu said. Fang Zhiyuan, one of China's top lawyers and chief lawyer at Beijing Yifang Law Firm, said that if Roche was found guilty of spreading rumors, the company would be fined and the people involved would be sentenced. Whether Roche is guilty has yet to be proved. But one thing is for sure: The Chinese local government is cracking down on the problem of businesses making illegal profits from outbreaks of disease or rumors which cause panic. *Xinhua News Agency* reported that Guangzhou price authorities formed 22 inspection teams and gave warnings to more than 330 businesses during the recent outbreak. Among them, three businesses were fined 200,000 yuan or closed up for seven days for raising prices of medicine and salt illegally. A number of other rumors circulated recently about the fatal infectious disease, including suggestions of a buying spree for salt and rice. According to *China News Service*, five people were detained, fined or re-educated last Friday for spreading such rumors. On February 12, citizens in Panyu, Guangzhou city received mobile phone short messages that a boat carrying pesticide had turned over in the Shawang river, causing a rush to purchase and store water.

China Aims for Space

China's first manned space shuttle will be launched this year

The tragedy of America's shuttle Columbia plunging to earth and the death of its seven crew on February 3 has not deterred China from its own space objectives. The manned spacecraft Shenzhou V is scheduled to be launched in the second half of this year. Shenzhou V has already entered its testing and assembly stage. The launch is intended for November but the exact launch date will depend on weather conditions and how the testing program goes. Huang Chunping, general director of China's manned space rocket project, said Chinese scientists would draw lessons from Columbia and enhance their own management and quality control. But the tragedy will not influence the progress of China's space program. Huang said China started to focus on manned space travel after the Shenzhou IV was successfully launched on December 30 last year. To ensure the safety of the astronauts, Long March II F, the rocket that carries Shenzhou V, will be equipped with an automatic fault detecting system and emergency escape system. Two or three astronauts will be selected for the space mission from 14 fighter pilots in service. All the candidates are men, aged below 30, about 170 cm in height and 65 kg in weight, each of whom have an accumulated flight time of more than 1,000 hours. They are receiving training at the China Astronauts Training Center in the suburbs west of Beijing. China started its space initiative, named Shenzhou, in 1993. Between November 1999 and December 2002, four unmanned Shenzhou spaceships were successfully launched. Scientific research tests were conducted on board, which have paved a way for Chinese astronauts to explore space. The previous four launches were made at midnight or in the early morning, which makes it easier for the ground optical tracking devices to follow the targets. But the Shenzhou V will be launched in the daytime because the temperature in the daytime may help to launch the shuttle and ensure the safety of the astronauts.

There are three steps in China's manned space initiative. First, the launching of unmanned and manned spaceships, sending astronauts into orbit to conduct observations and scientific tests and bringing them back safely. Second, astronauts will walk in space and complete the connection of spaceship and space capsule as well as launching a prototype space laboratory. Third, building a space station. (Edited by Ivy Zhang)



Shenzhou IV before takeoff last December



Paperback Writer

“I like the atmosphere in bars, there are all kinds of people coming in everyday, some happy and some sad, all have emotions on their faces. Sometimes I looked at them as if I was reading different books.”

“The Chinese girls are like Qipao dresses, as if made from silk, soft, delicate and full of Chinese tenderness. The American girls are like jeans, casual, full of dynamism and vigor.”

“Where there is air, there is love. Air never vanishes, it is within our body, and comprises our lives.”

— Excerpt from *Half Face* published by Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House.

By Iris Miao

According to the weather forecast, this has been the coldest winter in ten years. The long spell of mild winters may be coming to an end, but for 23-year-old Zhuang Yu who has recently published three books, things are warming up nicely. *Half Face* (Ban Zhang Lian) and *Love Is a Non-refundable Bet* (Yuan Du Fu Shu) were both published last December by Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House, even though it's somewhat unusual for the company to publish more than one book per year by the same writer. To follow that up, Zhuang's third book *Inside and Outside a Pigsty* (Juan Li Juan Wai) came out this January.

This prolific output has won her some prominence among the dynamic new breed of young female writers in China. But despite her fondness for bars and king size cigarettes, Zhuang does not see herself as some literary wild child. “Actually I'm quite conventional,” she says.

Beijing gave me love

A writer's first book almost

invariably contains autobiographical elements and Zhuang Yu's debut *Half Face* is no exception. Sent to Beijing by Shandong Daily as a reporter in 1999, the young writer found herself a stranger in the intimidating capital. Zhuang sometimes watched people on the street, people like herself from other parts of the country. It occurred to her how much we all seem like orphans, how much we need friends, and how much we need love. “We are like birds with only one wing, we can't fly by ourselves. Only when we find another one-winged bird and embrace it can we fly.”

Her other half wing was a Columbia University graduate from the US. “He was the first gift Beijing gave me. I left behind my childhood ideal of being a reporter; later when this love left me, I quietly accepted it.”

The affair gave Zhuang Yu not only a memory engraved in her heart, but also formed the basis of *Half Face*. Details of her love life were spread through the pages of the book and also show up in *Inside and Outside a Pigsty*, such as the red lanterns hanging on her balcony.

There is a similar love pattern in the three books. The heroine has semi-violent tendencies and quarrels and fights plague the lovers. Zhuang says she hadn't considered this pattern but says quarrels and disagreements are a natural part of a loving relationship.

“I don't have violent tendencies myself, actually I'm a bit of a coward,” she says. But the heroine's tough appearance hiding a tender heart, “that's more like me.”

Life is a pigsty

To explain the somewhat strange title of her most recent book, *Inside and Outside a Pigsty*, the first paragraph starts with this: “Basically, I

spend every day of my life like a pig, paying attention to my comfort and enjoyment and nothing beyond. When I was living in Beijing, I used to divide the charming and attractive city into a number of “pigsties”: work pigsty, show biz pigsty, friends' pigsty, cultural pigsty. But pigs can also be melancholic, like me”.

The book appeared chapter by chapter on an overseas literature website, www.wenxuecity.com. The humorous story soon gathered a dedicated international online following. The first 20 chapters went online all at once but from then on Zhuang Yu had to finish one chapter everyday. “Usually I pasted one chapter around 2 pm,” said Zhuang. “If I didn't finish at the fixed time, people would leave messages to ask why.”

After chapter 30, the demand grew even more rapacious. Sometimes a whole web page would be filled with all kinds of discussions about the story, the relationships of the main characters and what would happen in the next chapter. “I had a break during the Mid-autumn Festival as my friends and I were having parties and I was celebrating my birthday. I didn't paste new chapters for several days. When I went back to my story, I saw many messages asking what was going on. Some people had even continued the story themselves, adopting my tone.”

“The first time I realized the power of words was when I received an email from a web friend,” Zhuang Yu says. In her email to Zhuang Yu, the girl told her, “Your book introduced me to a good man.” The girl, who lived in Munich, Germany, came across a North American man on the web and he advised her to read Zhuang Yu's novel. They waited for the next chapter each day and eagerly

discussed it. Through their conversations about the book, the two became good friends and now romance is in the air. “Your writing may bring an unexpected marriage for me,” the girl said in the email.

Another reader from Australia told Zhuang Yu that he and his ex-girlfriend sent chapters to each other, keeping them in touch even though they were 15,000 km apart. “I got many emails with stories like that,” Zhuang said. “I felt so grateful to receive them.”

Halfway through the story, a company in Beijing contacted Zhuang Yu saying they wanted to publish the completed book. The 55 chapters concluded on the web last November and came out in print this January.

A conservative born in the 70s

A generation of writers born in the 1970s have been packing their works onto the bookshelves of Beijing in the last few years. Some female writers have gained particular notoriety, with such modern subjects as bars, alcohol, love, sex and even homosexuality featuring prominently in their books. Some critics complain these women are merely seeking publicity for their inferior work.

During a promotion of *Half Face* in Tianjin this Spring Festival, a local reporter asked Zhuang Yu about her fellow female writers such as Wei Hui, Annie Baobei, and Jiu Dan.

Zhuang said she and her contemporaries all had different educational backgrounds and different experiences. They may be grappling with similar themes but the stories would never be the same.

Zhuang Yu feels she is a creature of the night, drinking coffee, wine, and smoking cigarettes, but at heart she still considers herself to be a fairly traditional girl. “I'm definitely not avant-garde or unconventional.”

Her definition of conventional is that ordinary people accept you, and don't regard you as strange. For example, she smokes, but rarely in front of old people who disapprove of girls smoking. “Being unconventional and

unorthodox creates a lot of pressure,” she says. “This is probably the major difference between myself and other writers of my generation. I can't write if I don't feel relaxed.”

Ideal

“My ideal of being a professional writer is to write one novel every three months,” Zhuang said, “that makes 4 books every year, preferably around 100,000 words each.”

She needs to speed up in that case. *Half Face* and *Love Is a Non-refundable Bet* were both finished in 2001. She went to Toronto on May 15, 2001 to study Media and Culture and *Inside and Outside a Pigsty* is the only book she wrote in 2002.

Asked whether she felt lucky and pleased at this sudden recognition despite the competition in the book market, Zhuang Yu replied with a modest smile, “Yes, a little bit.”

But she doesn't regard it as an overnight success story. “I walked the whole way step by step.” Holding a king size cigarette between her fingers, Zhuang Yu looks more like a woman in her thirties when she falls into silent contemplation. “Sometimes I look more tired than others, even if I am just sitting about,” she says. “That's because there are always stories on my mind.”

Zhuang Yu calls herself a worker in the literature industry rather than a writer. In her opinion, a writer must have accomplished something. They must have made a genuine contribution to culture, such as her favorite writers Yu Qiuyu, Jia Pingwa, and the Nobel prize winner Gao Xingjian. “I want to be a writer,” Zhuang says. But the title of “writer” is not like a hat that one can just put on, it should be acknowledged by time and by readers. “I like to have something heavy in my work.”

So she feels her works are too light so far? Perhaps they are, but who cares? She is only 23. Zhuang Yu still has two months to go before finishing her diploma at the University of Toronto, which has been postponed because she came back for the promotion of her books. After that, the deluge!



Zhuang Yu contemplates her next six novels.

Photos by Wang Wei

Stories Return to the Stage



"I'm confident my audience will keep returning to hear my stories," says Lian Liru.

By Zhao Pu

The opening of two story telling theatres this Spring Festival has launched a sequel to the tale of this popular folk art in Beijing, which was suspended 18 years ago when the last old story-telling theater in Tianqiao went out of business in 1984.

Back to the old atmosphere

As a traditional art of the city, storytellers used to have their own venues, in which they could interact directly with their audience. But with the rise of modern electronic media, those venues lost their popularity and gradually disappeared.

In recent years, people have still been able to enjoy the art of story telling, but only through TV and radio, or even the Internet. The old scene of drinking tea and listening to the storyteller in a small teahouse-like theater remained only as a memory.

In recent years, theaters dedicated to Peking Opera and *xiangsheng*, or cross-talk, have opened, or re-opened, around the city. Exponents of the art of story telling have also been keen to bring their art back to the stage.

"Genuine story telling could never live without its traditional venues, which means not only a place, but the right atmosphere for an art involving much interaction between the performer and the audience," says Lian Liru, a renowned story telling artist who

started performing in public at the age of 17.

Lian has been looking forward to returning to the stage for years. Last month, she contacted the Chaoyang Cultural Palace and put forward her plan to set up a story telling theatre there. The proposal was accepted and one of the Cultural Palace's mini theatres was converted into a story telling venue.

She debuted in the new theatre on Spring Festival day. The artist seemed very excited and gave a fluent narration of the first chapter of her favorite story, *Emperor Kangxi's Incognito Inspection Tour*.

Tian Zhanyi is another artist who shared Lian's desire to return to the stage. So when Li Ming, general manager of Beijing Longhui Cultural Development Company, invited him to host their Spring Festival story telling performance, he accepted without hesitation.

The theater for story telling established by the company, Guocuitang, opened on January 23. After a two week run, the company closed the stage for some adjustments, and will reopen it in March.

Traditional vs. innovative

Both of the two theatres were established to promote story telling as a traditional culture of Beijing, but Lian's performance strictly abides by the traditions of the story telling art, whereas the Guocuitang hosted by Tian



Both of the theatres see some twenty guests per day on average.



Tian Zhanyi gave a series of short inspiring stories to the audience during the Spring Festival.

Photos by Zhuang Jian

Zhanyi is more innovative, adjusting itself to audience of a new era.

61-year-old Lian is daughter of Lian Kuoru, the founder of the Lian school of story telling art. Her forte is in narrating traditional feature-length stories like *The Tales of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Legend of East Han Dynasty*, which she learned from her

father.

Before opening at the Liyuan theatre, she gave precise instructions to the theatre staff about the old customs of a traditional story telling arena, including how to greet the audience, and when and how to pour tea for them.

Her story telling lasts for one hour and a half every evening, seven days a week. Every story takes at least a week to complete, with the longer ones taking more than a month. "I'm confident my audience will keep returning to hear my stories," says Lian.

Tian's performance at the Guocuitang is comparatively innovative. He tells short stories instead of traditional long ones. Li Ming says, "Today's audience are different from those of the past. They have too many choices for entertainment. I don't think they have enough patience to spend one month, coming everyday for a long story."

Moral guidance is also an important element of Tian's stories. "There is too much violence and eroticism on TV now. I wish to remind people of those moral virtues with my stories," says the old artist.

Besides famous artists like Tian, Guocuitang will also invite some young storytellers to perform in the future. "The theatre is the best place for a young storyteller to develop and polish his art, we would like to provide them with such chances," says Li.

Both of the theatres see some twenty guests per day on average. "The establishment of a regular audience needs time. I am patient," says Lian.

Liyuan Theatre

Where: Chaoyang Cultural Place, Xiaozhuang, Chaoyang District
Open: 7:30-9:00pm
Admission: 10 yuan
Tel: 8599 4224

Guocuitang Theatre

Where: Baikongque Art World, 3 Dewai Dongdinhelu
Open: March
Admission: 20 yuan
Tel: 6235 6999 / 8207 7057

Background

Story telling and its venues

The tradition of story telling can be dated back to the 1600s in Beijing. At first, most storytellers were street buskers, performing in markets and other crowded areas. After 1900, some teahouses invited storytellers to perform for their customers, and the move proved so popular that simple stages soon appeared, giving the performances a more formal setting. Performers tell historical and legendary epics, usually holding a fan or a handkerchief as their only prop.



Stone fish carving

Work Begins on Underwater River Museum

By Wang Chunzhu

Construction began Thursday on an underwater museum to view an historic stone ridge that has charted the rise and fall of water levels on the Yangtze River for more than 1,200 years.

The low-water calligraphy monument Baiheliang (White Crane Ridge) stands in the shallows of the Yangtze River north of Fuling District near Chongqing, in area that will be inundated by the massive Three Gorges Dam, which has already started filling.

The inscriptions on the Yangtze's limestone riverbanks were only visible during rare occurrences of low water levels — approximately once a decade. Named after the white cranes that in ancient times congregated there, Baiheliang was declared a national monument in 1988. It features over 30,000 characters, including poems by travelers and accounts of boatmen and their navigational prowess, most of which date back to the Song Dynasty.

Water level changes on the Yangtze over a period of more than 1,200 years are recorded on the 1,600-meter-long, 15-meter-wide ridge. Fish carved into the rock wall, which have been used to measure water levels since the Tang Dynasty, appear during the dry season.

It is expected construction of the underwater museum will take two years to complete, but scientists have been discussing the best way to protect Baiheliang for the past eight years.

A number of different methods had been proposed, until Ge Xiurun, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, came up with a plan to build an underwater museum at eye level with the central section of the ridge, where most of the inscriptions are carved.



The inscriptions on Baiheliang
Photos by Qian Bingge

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By Wang Chunzhu

Last Friday, photography fans around the world were excited not because it was Valentine's Day, but because it was the day on which the winners of the 2003 World Press Photo (WPP) contest were announced in Amsterdam.

Since it was first held in 1957 in Holland, the annual event has been the world's premiere competition in photojournalism. Each year, an independent international jury of 13 judges rate photographs in nine categories: spot news, general news, people in the news, science and technology, sports, the arts, nature and the environment, portraits and daily life.

The expressed mission of WPP, the organization that runs the contest, is to promote the free and unrestricted exchange of information and encourage photojournalism to strive for higher quality standards. In order to make excellent photography accessible to the widest possible audience, exhibitions of winning shots tour the world each year. This year's collection will travel to over 70 locations around the globe.

Nearly 4,000 professional photographers from 118 countries participated in this year's WPP contest, the 46th, filing a record 53,597 images. One thing that came clear is that digital photography has taken a strong hold of photojournalism, as 69 percent of all submissions were made in digital format, up from 27.5 percent in 2001. Overall, the jury awarded prizes to 55 photographers from 20 countries, including one from China.



Monk of Shaolin Temple

First prize in the sport singles category; by Tomasz Gud-zowaty and Robert Boguslawski, Polish

Chinese WPP Contest Winners

Yang Shaoming won third prize in the people in the news stories category in 1988.

Li Nan earned first prize in the arts singles category in 1996.

Wang Yao was awarded first prize in the arts stories category in 2000.

Jia Guorong won third prize in the sports singles category in 2002.

Qi Xiaolong took home third prize in the science and technology singles category in 2003.

Opening Eyes and Minds: The World Press Photo Contest



Inside the Church of Nativity, Bethlehem

First prize in the people in the news stories category; by Carolyn Cole, American



Drew

Second prize in the daily life stories category; by Brenda Ann Kenneally, American



Female hostage of Moscow theater siege

Third prize in the spot news singles category; by Justin Sutcliffe, British



Ivory Coast

First prize in the spot news stories category; by George Gobet, French



Yasser Arafat

First prize in the people in the news singles category; by Scott Lewis, American



Boy mourns at his father's gravesite after earthquake, Qazvin Province, Iran

World Press Photo of the Year 2002; by Eric Grigorian, American

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Cala, My Dog! to Premiere in Beijing

By Dong Nan

A film that was screened as part of the International Forum of New Cinema at the Berlin International Film Festival last week will premiere in Beijing on March 5.

Lu Xuechang's *Cala, My Dog!* is about a middle-aged working man, known as Lao Er, whose chief source of stability and comfort in life is his dog, Cala. One day, when his wife is out walking Cala, a policeman confiscates the unregistered canine.

As Lao Er endeavors to recover his dog, the difficult circumstances of his life are revealed. There is no melodrama in this film, just an uncomfortable entanglement with imaginary hope. The tone is restrained and detached throughout.

Ge You, whose bald pate is more often associated with comic roles, puts in a straight performance as the tragic Lao Er,



A hirsute Ge You, as Lao Er

complete with hair.

Following the release of his first film, 1997's *The Making of*

Steel, Lu Xuechang was hailed as an outstanding member of the "Sixth Generation" of Chi-

nese directors. *Cala, My Dog!* is his third film, following 1999's *A Lingering Face*.



Maggie Zhang, Zhang Yimou and Zhang Ziyi from left to right

Hero Falls Short in Berlin

By Nebula Dong

Zhang Yimou's epic period piece *Hero* was awarded the Alfred Bauer Prize for a work of particular innovation at the Berlin International Film Festival Saturday, however to the many who were hoping the film would pick up one of the major prizes, the award came as something of a disappointment.

After losing out in Hollywood at last month's Golden Globe Awards, often seen as a barometer for the Academy

Awards in March, *Hero* won an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film.

Another Chinese director, Li Yang, won a Silver Bear for Outstanding Artistic Achievement for *Blind Shaft* (Mang Jing), about the plight of workers in illegal mines.

British director Michael Winterbottom's *In This World*, a story of two Afghan refugees journeying overland from Afghanistan to England, won the Golden Bear at this year's Berlin festival.

Red Poppy Blooms in Spring

By Dong Nan

A line of beautiful and vigorous young women pounding out stirring rhythms, that was "Beautiful Red Poppy—Spring Concert of the Female Percussion Team", performed by Red Poppy, at The Forbidden City Concert Hall last Friday.

Founded in 1999, Red Poppy comprises eight female artists, each with over ten years of music experience, with an average age of only 22.

Their musical style is a combination of traditional Chinese music and minority nationality influences, with a touch of jazz and new age. "We aim to be a unique percussion music band by delivering multi-cultural music," a press release by the band declares.

The audience clearly enjoyed the familiar melodies adopted from classics, particularly *Night Thoughts* (Ye Shen Chen), a touching tune from Peking Opera, and clapped along to the beat of the band's signature piece, *Noisy World* by Liu Sijun, a promising young composer, who wrote the tune especially for the band.

Since their inception, Red Poppy



Red Poppy Female Percussion Team

has been well received by audiences in Vancouver, Toronto, South Africa, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao and Beijing. The band will give performances in Xinjiang Autonomous Region next month, and is soon to release its first album.

Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev.

The virtuoso performance by violinist Liu Yunzhi of *Meditation*, from Massenet's opera, *Thais*, a sentimental story about mortal love and religious salvation, was a highlight. Li's 1640 Amati violin, on loan from the Stradivari Society, added a touch of class to the concert.

WORLDWIDE



one scene in Daredevil

Affleck's 'Daredevil' Weathers Box Office

The Marvel Comics adaptation *Daredevil* in which the ubiquitous actor plays a visually challenged vigilante, grossed \$47.3 million over the four-day US Presidents Day holiday weekend, according to studio estimates issued on Monday.

The movie had no problem setting a new record for the Presidents Day holiday, beating the \$23 million debut of the Denzel Washington drama *John Q* last year. It also ranks as the No. 2 February opener of all time after 2001's *Hannibal* (\$58 million).

Daredevil is a relatively obscure entry in the Marvel canon, revolving around a blind attorney who is a crime-fighting vigilante by night. (Reuters)



Nicole Kidman

Nicole Kidman Says Acting Fills Her with Fear

Hollywood star Nicole Kidman confessed on Monday that she has a phobia of acting and said, "Every time I star in a film, I think I cannot act."

Kidman, hotly tipped for an Oscar for her critically acclaimed role in *The Hours*, said: "I've tried to pull out of almost every one I've done because of sheer terror."

"I can always come up with a list of actresses who would do better and try to convince the director to cast someone else," she told *Britain's Radio Times* magazine. (Reuters)

Yoko Ono to Release Dance Version of Lennon Song

John Lennon's widow Yoko Ono has recorded a dance version of the late Beatle's final song, her record label said Monday.

Ono has teamed up with British pop act the Pet Shop Boys for a dance remix of her husband's song *Walking on Thin Ice*.

"It's not clear when it's going to be released," a spokeswoman for Parlophone said, adding: "I've heard it, it's very good."



Yoko Ono

The single will get its first public performance in the United States Monday according to the web site of disc jockey Danny Tenaglia, who remixed the record. (Reuters)

Spice Girls Meeting Sparks Comeback Speculation

Posh, Baby, Scary, Sporty and Ginger are really, really going to meet up – but are five going to become one again?

All the members of the nineties pop phenomenon the Spice Girls – Victoria "Posh" Beckham, Mel "Sporty" Chisholm, Geri "Ginger" Halliwell, Mel "Scary" Brown, and Emma "Baby" Bunton – are set to meet up on Monday for the first time since their acrimonious split five years ago.

British newspapers were rife with speculation that the reunion could be the start of a Spice revival, with some of the band's members said to be keen on a "greatest hits" album and several one-off concerts after seeing their solo careers slump. (Reuters)



Conrad L. Hall

Cinematographers Give Award to Perdition, Hall

The American Society of Cinematographers has given their annual award for the best film photography to Conrad L. Hall, who died in January at age 76, for his work last year on drama *Road to Perdition*.

The award, handed out late Sunday night at a gala ceremony in Los Angeles, begins a string of honors that will be handed out in Hollywood by associations representing various professions like writers, directors and producers ahead of Hollywood's top film honors, the Oscars, on March 23. (Reuters)



A Classic Night Out

By Dong Nan

The China National Philharmonic Orchestra gave concerts last Friday and Saturday at Tianqiao Theater titled "Classics are also Romantic," to celebrate both the western Valentine's Day and Chinese Lantern Festival.

Audiences at the two-hour extravaganza were subjected to a string of classic love themes chosen by conductor Li Xincan, including Wagner's prelude from *Tristan and Isolde*, Rossini's prelude from *the Barber of Seville*, popular arias from Verdi's *La Traviata* and Puccini's *La Boheme*, and two interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*, by

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Tasteful Tools for Tea

By Huang Lisha

The Qiaoying tea boutique is designed to echo its name, which means "shadow of a bridge". To reach the store, customers must first cross a dramatic decorative bridge paved in glass on which the store's name is inscribed in beautiful calligraphy.

That is hardly run-of-the-mill decoration for a tea store, and betrays the fact that Qiaoying clearly targets the high-end market. The small store is crammed with a wide range of earthenware and pottery tea sets. One standout is the attractive *Pantao Xianshou* set (1,800 yuan), made in the "china capital" of Jingdezhen, each piece of which is snow white with small paintings of peaches, traditional symbols of long life.

The *Jixiang Ruyi* tea set (400 yuan) is more Japanese style. The bases of the cups in this set

Siji Zhixiu tea set, 1,200 yuan



Photo provided by Qiaoying

Riches of Stitches

By Liang Hongling

The Technology Exhibition Center behind Shuang'an Plaza is the unlikely home of many cute, off-beat stores. Among the more popular is a small shop that specializes in cross-stitch, a Western embroidery style.

The needlework patterns on sale at the Anchor Cross Stitch store on the center's third floor are modern takes on this traditional Celtic art and are ideal gifts for birthdays, weddings and other variations.

Themes range from classical grillwork to animals, from flowers to fruit and almost everything in between. The finished pieces can go on accessories, clothes, blankets or other bases as customers desire. Smaller items such as key rings and coasters make nice tokens of friendship. Plus, cross stitch patterns look great on t-shirts or on their own in frames as wall hangings.

The same floor of the center is home to another cross stitch store named Ci Ke Fang, which does not have as great a range as Anchor, but does offer some fun cartoon patterns.

Cross stitch technique is not hard to learn, and the two stores are not interested in keeping the secret to themselves. In fact, they both offer free lessons, so people who catch the cross-stitch bug can create their own masterpieces.

Where: third floor of the Technical Exhibition Center (Keji Huizhan Zhongxin), west of Shuang'an Plaza at the Northwest corner of the Second Ring Road **Open:** 10 am - 9 pm **Tel:** 8251 1261



700 yuan



Four Great Inventions, 4,500 yuan Photo by Cui Hao

feature cleverly cut notches, called "*qiushao*", that make it nearly impossible for water to adhere to a cup's bottom. That detail gives the cups an elegant look and eliminates drip worries.

Besides tea sets, the store stocks many other exquisite gifts. Displayed in the window is a set of black and white dinnerware, in which each bowl and plate is half white, half black. On the black halves are printed red Chinese characters that read "*Li Jia*", or "The Li family", while the white halves are inscribed with a brief introduction to the origin of that name. These sets can be made to order for any of the old hundred names of China.

Fans of classic literature can check out an impressive version of Sunzi's The Art of War completely crafted from wood and priced at a cool 3,000 yuan.

Qiaoying of course also offers a wide range of teas to drink out of the beautiful porcelain sets. Manager, porcelain designer and namesake Li Qiaoying says that because the store's main business is designing tea gifts for companies, wholesale deals are welcomed.

Where: right side of Guobinjie, 400 meters north of Guiyou Shopping Center, Chaoyang District **Open:** 9 am - 11 pm **Tel:** 6584 2627

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650 yuan

Photos by Cui Hao

Silversmithing for Dummies

By Huang Lisha

Imagine receiving a compliment on your new locket and being able to respond, "Thanks, I made it myself." That is possible now that the do-it-yourself concept, increasingly popular in furniture and home decoration, has spread to a field most people probably never thought possible - silver jewelry.

This kind of jewelry first showed up in Japan around two years ago, and has in just the past three months been brought to the capital by Chuangyi Dabenying, a local store whose name means "Creation Headquarters."

The store is no regular silversmith. In fact, its secret for forging one's own jewelry is that the base material is not actually silver - it is a special metallic clay that looks and feels like plasticine. Not only is this material far easier to work with than actual silver, it is also much less expensive, going for 120 yuan for 10 grams.

The first step in personally crafting a piece of jewelry is to mold the clay into the intended shape, such as a ring or pendant, and then use tools to inscribe patterns on that base. For the less dexterous or artistically-inclined, the store offers molds and assistance to make sure your creation comes out just like you want.

After the actual crafting is done, pieces go into a kiln and bake for around 15 minutes. When they come out, they are covered with a layer white residue. Careful polishing removes that residue and reveals a shining silver surface that could fool all but experienced jewelers for the real thing.

Where: B3 of Xidan Culture Square **Open:** 9 am - 9 pm **Tel:** 6426 0114



Photos provided by Chuangyi Dabenying

The New "Classics"

By Salinda

Since modern Nordic and ancient Chinese furniture style have become the vogue, the interior décor of many homes has adopted clean lines and simpler styles. Those who lean more towards indulgence, opulence or kitsch, however, need not despair - there are several stores that can cater to their tastes.

One place to get flashy furniture is a showroom on the second floor of Dushifangqun Flower Market. Most pieces take their style cues from classical European furniture, often adopting Western art in unexpected ways. And even though most look like they would fit in a sultan's palace, because they come direct from the manufacturer, prices are not exorbitant.

Greek or Roman columns inspire the designs of a series of coffee tables and bookshelves that go for around 1,000 yuan each. Other coffee tables in the same price range have glass tops with bases designed to look like a swooning mermaid or an elephant raising its tusks.

Pieces sure to draw comment include a series of floor lamps based on sculptures of angels in



Wood fake fireplace, 3,200 yuan Photo by Peng Jianwei

various poses, which also fetch around 1,000 yuan. A set of golf clubs forms the body of another fun lamp priced at 230 yuan.

Colorful metallic and pottery items including vases, jars and cups on hand are good matches to a classic decoration scheme and cost under 1,000 yuan each. They would also be at home on top of the opulent dining set (40,000 yuan), which includes a glass table and silver and red chairs that look straight from Versailles.

Where: No.28, Puhuangyulu, Fengtai District **Open:** 8:30 am - 5:30 pm **Tel:** 8761 2896

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When it is dark in the east, it is bright in the west. This is true even on the small scale of dining in the capital. Since the remodeling of Ghost Street (Guijie or Dongzhimennei) took a big bite into that road's popularity, the title of most popular restaurant cluster seems to be in the process of moving from Chaoyang to Haidian District, more specifically, the one-kilometer street that runs south from Lianxiang Bridge on the North Third Ring Road.

This four-lane street, called Zaojunmiao and Xueyuan Nanlu, is home to two kinds of businesses: auto repair shops in the north, and restaurants, a total of 32, in the south. While that number means Ghost Street still has the edge in terms of quantity, this street offers a greater variety, with eateries ranging from specialists in noodles and snacks to barbecue, spicy crabs, family style dishes and Hunan, Sichuan and Northeast cuisines. Plus, nearly all the establishments are inexpensive.

However, Guijie looks to remain the favorite of the city's late-night hungry ghosts because most of the restaurants on Zaojunmiao close at around 11 pm.

Diners looking to burn the midnight oil can hit the KTV house, bar and two teahouses on the street that shut their doors far later. This street is slated to become more like Ghost Street in the near future, as a road broadening project will go into the works this year that will lead to the demolition of the east side of the street. Another place for fun bites the dust.

In the meantime, *Beijing Today* has selected five restaurants and one bar that stand out because of their food, décor, or both.



By James Liu
Xiaobeikuang Mushroom Banquet

Located in the middle reaches of the street, this restaurant was one of the first in Beijing to push the mushroom banquet concept. Xiaobeikuang means a kind of basket carried on the back while mushroom picking.

Since opening in October two years ago, Xiaobeikuang has consistently packed 'em in by offering 56 kinds of fungus, fresh and air-dried, boiled in casseroles with a variety of meats, including exotic items like wild fowl and turtles. Now is a great time to get one's mushroom fix, because all varieties are going for 30 to 50 percent off for the next month or two. "The number of customers has increased since we kicked off this promotion before Spring Festival. So, we'll keep going with it and wait for top management to tell us to stop," said manager Hu Zhimin.

While having 56 varieties does not give it the widest range of mushroom choices in the city, Xiaobeikuang does offer ten kinds of hotpot bases, the most in Beijing. The most expensive broth is called *longfeng guo*, which includes boiled grass snake and black boned chicken and goes for 168 yuan. *Bawangbieji*, another nutrient-rich soup, is made with turtle and black boned chicken



Diners at the Jiuliuxiang Barbecue Restaurant

Photos by Zhuang Jian/Liang Zongqin

Ghosts Migrate West

and priced at 148 yuan.

Fussier diners will enjoy the restaurant's small-pot service, in which each customer gets their own small hotpot that can be spiced to personal taste. The small pots go for 15 yuan each and up.

Diners who wish to branch out from mushrooms can also try the regular dishes, though they tend not to be too regular, such as fried scorpions (*xiangsu xiezi*, 28 yuan).

Add: No.3 Zaojunmiao Dongli, Haidian **Open:** 10 am-2 pm, 5 pm-9:30 pm **Tel:** 6212 4310 **Average cost:** about 50 yuan per person



Zhangji Mianguan (Zhang's Noodle Restaurant)

This restaurant's huge orange sign and massive windows give it the most eye-catching facade on the street. The inside is decorated with around 10 simple tables and stools to sit on. And even though it specializes in simple fare, there is normally a line, meaning the kitchen is doing something right.



The specialty of the house is Lanzhou-style hand-pulled noodles boiled with beef or mutton (*lamian*). A big bowl costs only 6 yuan, while the smaller bowl goes for 5 yuan. Aside from the hand-pulled noodles, the kitchen cooks up stewed wide noodles (*hui mianpian*, 8 yuan), stir-fried wide noodles (*chao mianpian*, 10 yuan) and Beijing-style *zhaji-angmian* (pork and bean paste noodles).

Because of its funky décor, the restaurant was the location of a scene in the movie *Zhang-dengjiecai*, released in March last year. Zhangji's beef noodles

are without a doubt the best on the street, and should not be missed.

To accompany the noodles, the menu offers many kinds of cold dishes, none of which cost more than 6 yuan. The only hot dish is *yanggaorou*, lamb that is boiled then braised, which goes for 18 yuan.

Add: No. 55 Zaojunmiao Lu, Haidian **Open:** 10 am-12 am **Tel:** 6214 5635 **Average cost:** 10 yuan per person and up



Sichuan Restaurant

This restaurant is one of the three branches of the famed eatery of the same name that opened in October 1959. The massive original, south of Chang'an Avenue near Xuanwumen, was a favorite of such state leaders as Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Deng



Boiled Chinese cabbage (kaishui baicai)

Xiaoping, who also took foreign leaders there for a taste of authentic Sichuan cuisine.

Though it is not the original, this Haidian branch offers the same standard of culinary excellence as its namesake. Many of the ingredients are shipped in directly from Sichuan Province, as are the chefs, who cook up dishes the way they would at home.



Stewed beef cheek (sanyuan niulian)

One signature dish is braised sea cucumber with Sichuan sauerkraut (*suancai haishen*), which fetches 138 yuan. Sautéed shrimp meat (*yuxiang xiarou*, 88 yuan), is perhaps the restaurant's best

sautéed dish.

Many dishes check in as less spicy than expected. "Sichuan cuisine is known for being hot and spicy. But being too hot and spicy is definitely not real Sichuan style," said Wang Xiaoying, vice general manager of the restaurant.

While many of the specialties are pricey, there are items for the more budget conscious. In fact, the restaurant is pushing a range of home-style dishes that cost around 30 yuan each to appeal to a larger market. Chinese, English and Japanese menus are available.

Add: Second floor, Zhongruan Building, No. 55 Xueyuan Nanlu, Haidian **Open:** 10:30 am-2 pm, 5:30 pm-9 pm **Tel:** 6218 6618 **Average cost:** 70 yuan per person and up



Marinated beef (kao niurou)

Jiuliuxiang Barbecue Restaurant

Not only one of the earliest eateries to open on the street (August 2000), this is also the only 24-hour Korean-style barbecue restaurant on Zaojunmiao.

Prices are very reasonable, with a big plate of raw beef steak for grilling going for 38 yuan, while smoked raw beef costs 36 yuan and sliced pork brisket only



Fish roe soup (yuzi tang)

18 yuan. The skillful waitstaff is happy to help diners grill their meat choices to perfection.

Good accompaniments to a meat-a-thon are Korean soups based on fish roe (*yuzi tang*, 18 yuan) or miso paste (*jiang tang*, 12 yuan).

The restaurant has four rooms and a main hall that can seat around 100 diners. Every month, certain dishes are given 20 percent discounts for around

15 days.

Diners can quench their thirst with a free mixture of barley and corn tea. Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean menus are available.



Pot-stewed goose heads (lushui etou)

Add: No. 1A Zaojunmiao Lu, Haidian **Open:** 9:30 am-5 am **Tel:** 6211 2911 **Average cost:** between 20 yuan and 50 yuan per person

Jiaxiang'e Restaurant (Goose Restaurant)

The goose is cooked in this restaurant, which stands out with its neon sign with a dozen geese. Since opening in 1996, the Guizhou-style restaurant has reaped in the cash and honors, leading to the launch of another branch in Beijing and one more in Shanghai.

Jiaxiang'e's signature items are goose-based dishes and hotpots. A whole goose boiled in hotpot with wild herbs costs a mid-range 65 yuan. "Goose dishes can strengthen the body in win-



Millet steamed in pineapple (boluo xiaomi)

ter and exorcise inner heat in the summer." Lu Chun, manager of the restaurant, told *Beijing Today*. There are around 30 goose-related dishes on the menu, including pot-stewed goose heads (*lushui etou*), which fetch 6 yuan each.

True to its Guizhou inspiration, the restaurant offers sour soup dishes and Guizhou-style staple foods. Millet steamed in pineapple (*boluo xiaomi*, 28 yuan), has a sweet flavor that rings of pineapple. Even the steamed Guizhou rice (*Guizhou xiangmi*), twice the price of most restaurants' rice at 2 yuan, is good enough to justify the extra expense.

Add: No.3 Zaojunmiao, Haidian **Open:** 11:30 am-2 pm, 5:30 pm-10

pm **Tel:** 6212 6945 **Average cost:** 30 yuan per person

Rhythm and Liquor Bar

The far north end of the street is home to the only bar in the area, the Huge'ariha Bar. The establishment, which opened last February, is run by a Mongolian man and its name in Mongolian is a combination of the words for rhythm and liquor. Not a bad weekend combination.

The bar is situated on the second floor of a building on the east side of the street and decorated with basic wood tables and benches. In flickering candlelight, Mongolian musicians and



singers perform every night on a stage reminiscent of a yurt on the grasslands. The Mongolian theme is continued by a tapestry with a picture of Genghis Khan and several *matouqin*, bowed string instruments with scrolls carved like horse heads, that hang on the wall.

Waiter Liu Xiaobin said, "Our aim in opening this bar is to introduce Mongolian culture and music to the city." It seems to have done so while also finding a warm place in the hearts of many of the city's Mongolian residents.

The bar mainly sells spirits, some made in Inner Mongolia, but cocktails, beer and wine are also available. Prices are similar to those along Sanlitun bar



street. You can also get a non-alcoholic Mongolian fix with milk items such as milk tea (25 yuan for 1.3 liters), milk bars (28 yuan each), and grilled beef and mutton.

The band hits the stage nightly from 9:30 to 12.

Add: No. 12 Zaojunmiao Dongli, Haidian District **Open:** 9:30 pm-2 am **Tel:** 6219 3714



Eye



Panda

Photos by Heather Angel

Natural Visions

Multi-award winning wildlife photographer Heather Angel will be exhibiting her work in Beijing. Angel, a British-based environmental photographer, is a visiting professor with the school of Life and Environmental Sciences at Nottingham University. She was also the President of the British Royal Photographic Society in the 1980's. She will be running photography workshops.

Where: Sun Dong An Shopping Center **When:** February 21-March 7 **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6590 6503 ext 323

Parties

This Week's Music

Tonight a performance sponsored by No. 13 Music Workshop. On Saturday the band Cold Blooded Animal (*LengxueDongwu*) will be on stage.

Where: Get Lucky, 500 meters east of the south gate of the University of International Business and Economics, Chaoyang **When:** 9 pm **Admission:** adults 40 yuan, students 30 yuan **Tel:** 6429 9109, 6420 4249

Three Bands

Tonight a wide range of styles, including alt-rock Mountain Man (*Shan Ren*). On Saturday night Happy Street (*Xingfu Dajie*) will perform. And on Thursday 27 Cotton Clothes (*Bu Yi*) will perform.

Where: What, opposite north gate of the Business and Economics University, Chaoyang **When:** 9 pm **Admission:** 20 yuan **Tel:** 13910 209249

Anthony Papas and others

Anthony Papas will be on stage, supporting DJs are Spark and Bobby from Hong Kong and Maef-U from Berlin.

Where: Banana Club, Jianguomenwai Dajie **When:** February 28, 8:30 pm **Admission:** 100 yuan **Tel:** 6528 3636, 13121 012293



Christian Smith

Christian Smith

Christian Smith, both a DJ and producer, brings his amalgamation of funky house and tribal techno.

Where: the Club **When:** February 28, 10 pm **Tel:** 13001 135089, 13311 120235

Big Happy

Tonight the Big Easy band will invite you get in the groove with them. On Thursday Jackie Sugar Mama will hit the stage.

Where: Big Easy, south gate of Chaoyang park **When:** February 21&27, 9 pm **Tel:** 6508 6776

Regular Activity

Tonight is hip hop night with DJs Wesley and Wu manning the decks, and a hip hop happy hour from 10 pm-midnight. On Saturday there will be deep house and funky house with DJs Niels (Norway) and A Wei (PRC).

Where: Club Orange **When:** Every Friday and Saturday, 9 pm **Tel:** 6415 7413

Sports

Rise High

This is a hike connecting two villages and there are two options. You can either start at the top or hike up to the peak from the pass and then join the main trail to go down the mountain. The peak is 800 meters above sea level. Our starting point is already high, so it is not an 800-meter climb. A reward of this climb is that you will get breathtaking views.

Where: Changping, north of Beijing **When:** February 23, 8:30 am outside Starbucks at Lido Hotel, 9 am at Capital Paradise front gate, come back at 5 pm **Admission:** adults 150 yuan, children 100 yuan **Tel:** 13701 003694 **Email:** bjhikers@yahoo.co.uk

Performance



Tibetan Antelope

A dance with humans imitating Tibetan antelopes, creatures of the high Qinghai-Tibetan plateau. The dance is about the happiness and difficulties of the antelopes, and aims to call attention to the plight of this rare beast which is on the verge of extinction.

Where: Poly Theatre **When:** February 21-22, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 80-680 yuan **Tel:** 6406 8888



Love in the Old Summer Palace

Directed by Chen Weiya, composed by Zhao Jiping and designed by Gao Guangjian, starring Sun Xiaojuan, Wang Zihan, Wang Ke, Mu Ren. An old stonemason, working in the old Summer Palace for most of his life, is sentenced to death because he happens to break a rare stone tablet offered by the emperor in the Qing Dynasty. Before his death, he asks his disciple stonemason to take care of his daughter. The young couple fall in love but the chief eunuch in charge of stone carving in the palace decides to intervene...

Where: Nationality Cultural Palace Theater **When:** February 25-27, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 80-480 yuan (580 yuan VIP) **Tel:** 6406 8888

Chinese Kung Fu Show

With thousands of years of Chinese culture to draw on for inspiration and fuelled by the blossoming talent of around 50 young performers, this dazzling 75-minute show tells a Romeo and Juliet style love story incorporating the mysterious skills of Chinese Kung Fu.

Where: Xin Rong Theatre, 16 Baizhifang Road, Xuanwu **When:** till March 4, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 280, 150 yuan **Tel:** 8354 0774

Lecture



Ququ

All about crickets

Chinese people have a rich tradition of cricket breeding, and even crickets fighting. A famous cricket master, Wu Jichuan, will offer knowledge on the variety, breeding and keeping of the various insects (ququ, guoguo and youhulu). The master was once involved in the project to prevent corrosion of Mao's dead body, after which his interest turned to these insects, a subject on which he has published numerous books.

Where: Lee's Antique Carpets

When: February 22, 2:30-4:30 pm **Admission:** adults 30 yuan, students 20 yuan **Tel:** 8851 4913

Learn calligraphy and evolution of Chinese characters

Take up a brush and have a go at calligraphy. Cultivate your mind and concentration, and feel the qi (vital energy) flowing smoothly within your body.

Where: Lee's Antique Carpets, Liangmaqiao Lu, close to 21st Century Hotel. **When:** February 23, 2:30-4:30 pm **Admission:** 20 yuan **Tel:** 8851 4913

Activities

Breezer Night!

Special promotion for the night is Bacardi Breezer, which means your first free drink will be a Breezer. Huxley's has loads of cheap drinks & food on offer and of course the Shooter Bar will be open again. Lucky Draw Prizes from Magellan International Movers including a bottle of champagne and three memberships to Evolution Fitness. Huxley's and Bacardi will also be offering some great prizes.

Strange Visitations, Beijing's freshest and most original cover band, will perform live. And don't worry - they've already promised not to play Hotel California!

Where: Huxley's 2, a bit east of the South Gate of Worker's Stadium **When:** February 26, 6:30 pm **Admission:** 100 yuan **Tel:** 6552 9155

Punchline Comedy

Punchline's funny guys are returning to Beijing for spring comedy. Always a great show, always packed, so book tickets in advance.

Where: Poacher's **When:** February 28, 8 pm **Admission:** 200 yuan **Tel:** 13681 464488 **Email:** punchlinecomedy@btinternet.co.uk

Exhibitions

Photo Exhibition

The exhibition features 200 old photos and 300 artifacts related to the Spring Festival. These photos and artifacts are collected from four different museums in Beijing and are set in six parts depicting the origin, celebration and development of the festival in China.

Where: Museum of the Chinese Revolution **When:** till February 26, 9 am-5 pm **Tel:** 6526 3355

Fan Exhibition

Though today they usually serve as a form of interior decoration, painting on fans is a long established style of Chinese traditional painting. The paintings are usually watercolors of landscapes and objects in simple shapes and lines.

Where: Universal Classical Cultural and Arts Centre, 29 Dongzhongjie Dongcheng **When:** till February 28, 9 am-5 pm **Tel:** 6418 3012

Abstract Art

Art works by German artists Hugo Seegatz and Hans Gerd Doneck in abstract shapes and colors. Fusing pastel and water color in their works, both expressionists have been dedicated to the use of oils, canvas and paper to express their feelings towards human life and relationships.

Where: Z&A Space Gallery, 422-511 Wangjing Xiyuan **When:** February 22-March 16, 1-7 pm (except Monday) **Tel:** 6471 1700

Soul of India

As one of the four ancient civilizations, ancient India was a land of mythology. Its bronze making has a long history. This exhibition features over 80 invaluable unearthed bronzes. Some of them are evidence of the time honored cultural exchange between India and China.

Where: China Millennium Altar, 9A Fuxinglu **When:** till March 17 **Tel:** 6857 3287



Old Street

Collection Exhibition

The exhibition features a collection of oil paintings, prints and ink wash paintings by many famous painters. Most of the works have been collected by Creation Gallery over many years.

Artists show their different worlds, experiences and themes.

Where: Creation Gallery, north end of Ritan Donglu, Chaoyang **When:** February 28, 10 am-7 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 8561 7570.



Looking by Yu Xiaodong

Tibetan Art Works

Lu Tianning and Yu Xiaodong have lived in Tibet for a long time, working as researchers of Tibetan religion and culture and visiting all the temples and small villages they could find. The materials they use mainly come from nature and folk customs and are used to express their love for the Tibetan people, religion, culture and landscape.

Where: Qin Gallery, Huaweili Enjoy Paradise1-1E (North of Beijing Curio City) Chaoyang **When:** till February 28, 9:30 am-7 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 8779 0461



Overlooking by Lin Chunyan

Space Transfer

Nine artists including Wang Huaxiang, Feng Feng, Deng Jianjin, Ye Lei, Liu Manwen, Zheng Xuewu, Lin Chunyan, Zhang Chen and Wei Ligang, present the latest fruits of their musings, including Wang Huaxiang's woodcuts and Zheng Xuewu's densely wrought multi-media works. Painter-poet Feng Feng displays his stark abstract pieces, which often contain mineral pigments for an added richness.

Where: Red Gate Gallery **When:** February 22-March 9, 10 am-5 pm (Tuesday- Sunday) **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6525 1005



Sixth of relics by Zheng Xuewu

Old Past

Broad-line pencil sketches by Kuang Han will be exhibited. Oil paintings by Han Xuejun, Liu Baomin, Li Huiyang are also on display, as works by new artists Zhang Qitian and Yu Da.

Where: Wangfung Gallery, 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng **When:** till February 28 **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6523 3320

Sculpture Exhibition

Li Zhangyang from Chongqing presents a vision of common life, using humor to reveal the unfairness of society. He currently teaches sculpture at the Sichuan Art Academy and his works have been exhibited all over China and in Paris.

Where: China Art and Archives and Warehouse **When:** February 29-10, Wednesday-Sunday, 1-6 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 8456 5152

Movies



Reese Witherspoon

Sweet Home Alabama

Directed by Andy Tennant, starring Reese Witherspoon, Patrick Dempsey and Fred Ward. Melanie gets married in Alabama but separates and moves to the big city. In New York she has a successful career and she also meets fascinating bachelor Andrew who proposes to her.

So Melanie decides to go back home and persuade her husband to grant her a divorce. But she's in for a surprise. Chinese with English subtitles.

Where: Concert Hall of China National Library, Zhongguancun Nandajie **When:** till February 25 **Tel:** 8854 5520, 6841 9220

Sigh

Directed by Feng Xiaogang, starring Lui Pei, Xu Fan, Zhang Guoli. A middle-aged, married screenwriter falls in love with his younger assistant while they are away from home, working together on Hainan Island. When they return to Beijing, he goes back to his wife and daughter but the lovers continue to meet. Eventually, his wife discovers his secret, and she files for divorce but soon falls seriously ill. Chinese with English subtitles.

Where: Cherry Lane Movies, 29 Liangmaqiao Lu **When:** February 21-22, 8 pm **Admission:** 40 yuan **Tel:** 6430 1398 **Email:** michael@cherrylanemovies.com.cn

And God Created Woman

Directed by Roger Vadim, starring Rebecca DeMornay, Vincent Spano, Frank Langella, Donovan Leitch Jr., Jim J. Bullock. A beautiful free spirit whose priority is pleasure finds her spontaneous style always gets her in trouble. With a smitten politician in one hand and a husband in the other, she creates her own rules - then breaks them. English with Chinese subtitles.

Where: Space for Imagination, 5 Xiwangzhuang Haidian **When:** February 22, 7 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6279 1280

One Hundred Steps (I Cento Passi)

Directed by Marco Tullio Giordana. An investigation into the life of Peppino Impastato, a brave young man who unflinchingly resisted the Sicilian Mafia throughout his short life, consistently refusing to bow to their oppressive demands. In the 1970s he paid for his defiance with his life, like his grandfather before him who was also murdered by the Mafia. Italian with English subtitles.

Where: Italian Embassy Cultural Office **When:** February 27, 7 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6532 2187

The Umbrella Store (Ren Jian You Ai)

Directed by Clifton Ko, starring Chow Chifai, Law Roon Lan and Alice Lau. This Cantonese film is about a famous Chinese umbrella store that opened in 1886 and continued through three generations despite much hardship.

Where: Dongchuang Theatre **When:** February 27, 8:30 pm **Admission:** 30 yuan **Tel:** 6416 9253

Music

China Philharmonic Orchestra Concert

Conductor: Long Yu, the program includes Carmina Burana by Carl Orff

Where: Forbidden City Concert Hall **When:** February 22, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 50-480 yuan **Tel:** 6528 7673 ext 508

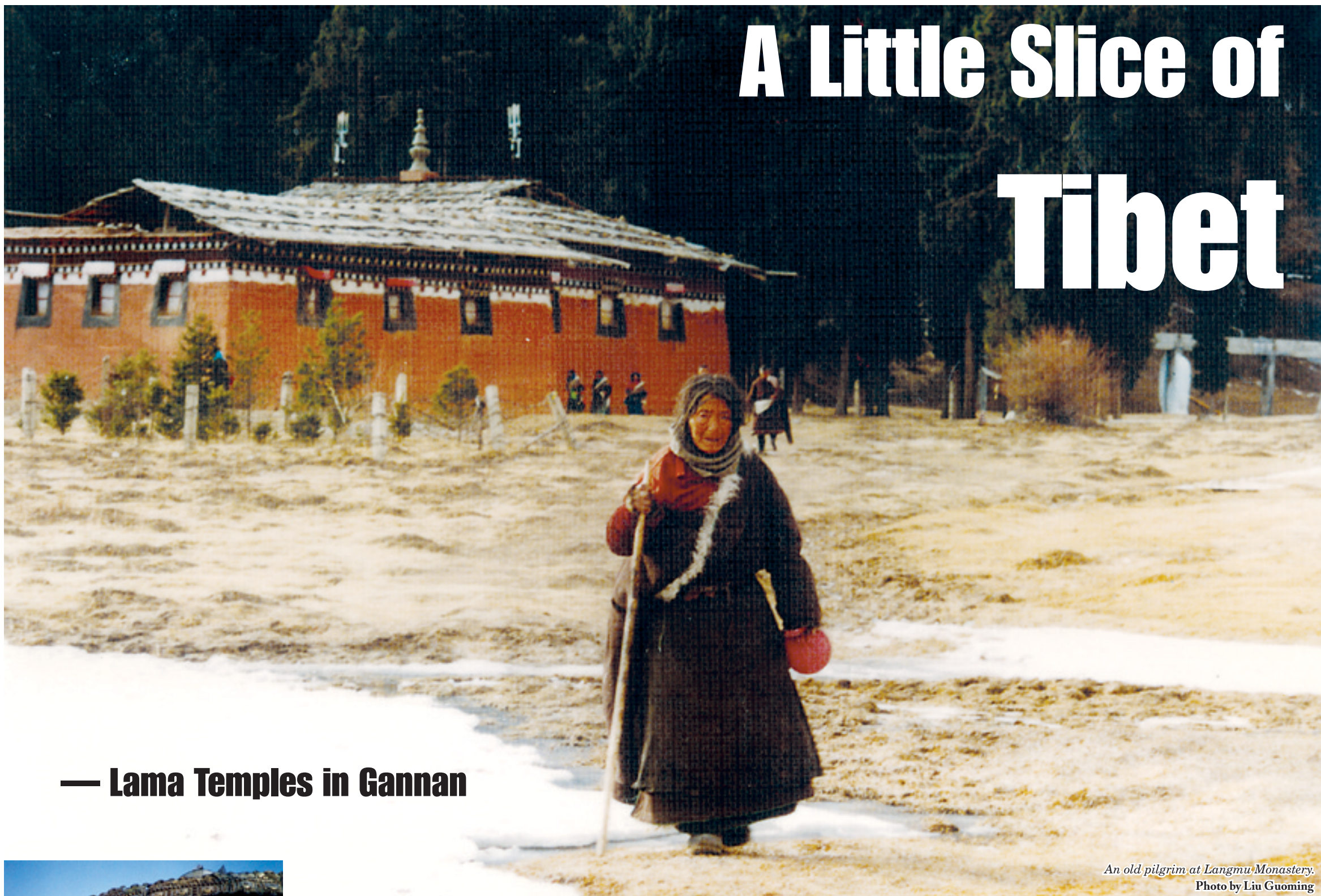
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By Guo Yuandan



A Little Slice of Tibet

An old pilgrim at Langmu Monastery.
Photo by Liu Guoming

— Lama Temples in Gannan



Gold-plated Buddha relief on the facade of Gongtang Pagoda.



Students at Labrang Monastery



Shouxu Temple



A nomad encampment at Maqu

Photos by Joel Kirkhart

By Zhang Qingning/Huang Lisha

To most people, Gansu conjures images of camel trains, the Gobi Desert and the boundless Loess Plateau. However the southwest corner of the province is just about as far removed from that picture as is possible. Snow capped mountain peaks, rising and falling grassland, beautiful and mysterious lama temples can all be found in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (甘南藏族自治州).

Labrang Monastery

Meaning “monks’ palace,” Labrang Monastery (拉卜楞寺) stands on a hill above the Daxia River, at Xiahe (夏河). One of the six main monasteries of the Gelugpa Sect of Tibetan Buddhism (the others are in Lhasa and Shigatse, in Tibet, and near Xining, in Qinghai), the entire architectural complex covers an area of over 400,000 square meters.

The monastery was originally built in 1,709, the 48th year of the reign of Qing Dynasty Emperor Kangxi, by E'angzongzhe, the first generation living Buddha. Since then, it has been restored and enlarged on several occasions. Today, Labrang forms a huge monastery complex, with 108 temples, six colleges (zha cang), and numerous halls of Buddhas.

Labrang is the biggest Tibetan Buddhist college in China, with a collection of over 60,000 volumes of valuable scriptures. During the height of its prosperity, the monastery housed over 3,600 monks, and its authority extended from Gansu to Qinghai, Sichuan, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and northeast China. The architectural style is a mixture of Tibetan and imperial Chinese, and every structure is crowned with a golden roof.

The largest single building within Labrang is the great scripture hall of Wensi College (闻思学院大经堂). The center of the whole monastery, the scripture hall is a typical Tibetan style structure, composed of the front hall, front courtyard, main hall and rear hall.

Shouxu Temple (寿福寺) is another highlight of the monastery. It is a six-story structure, of which the top section is a square pavilion with upturned eaves. The temple is also called “Dajinwasi,” meaning “great temple with golden tiles,” a reference to the gold-plated copper tiles, lions, dragons and other auspicious symbols that decorate its roof.

In the south corner of the monastery stands the Gongtang Pagoda (贡唐宝塔). Shaped like a Tibetan stupa, the pagoda is a 31-meter-high five-story structure, with a pinnacle crowned with sun, moon and star shaped deco-

ration. On the facade are eight gold-plated Buddhas in relief. Inside, there is a collection of more than 20,000 volumes of Buddhist sutras on the second floor and 1,032 bronze Buddha statues on the third floor. There are also over one hundred vivid murals preserved in the pagoda.

Butter sculptures, Thangkas, and *duixiu* are three distinctively Tibetan crafts, and all can be found at Labrang. Butter sculptures are made by filling a carved wooden mould with butter (usually yak butter). The resulting piece, usually a flower, an auspicious animal or a scene of religious significance, is then painted and decorated.

Thangkas (a Tibetan word meaning “silk, satin or cloth painting scroll”) have been a part of Tibetan religious life for centuries, however it is unclear how they evolved. The content of Thangkas is invariably religious, although modern versions sometimes feature distinctly secular imagery.

Typically brightly colored, Thangkas are usually in the form of a scroll, around 75 centimeters long and 50 centimeters wide. There are also “banner style” Thangkas, which are generally 1.1 meters long and 3.5 meters wide. In terms of the material they are made from, there are two types. *Gos-thang* Thangkas are made by embroidery, weaving and patchwork, while *bris-thang* Thangkas are made by painting pigments onto a cloth base.

Almost every Tibetan monastery collects a number of large-scale Thangkas that are displayed during important ceremonies, and Labrang is no exception. The Sakyamuni Biography is the most precious of the monastery’s Thangkas. It vividly describes the stories of the Buddha Sakyamuni’s birth, leaving home, and renouncing his family to become a monk. During the traditional festival Shaifo Festival (the festival of drying Buddha images in the sun), visitors have many opportunities to see these extraordinarily beautiful Thangkas.

Duixiu, or loop-piling embroidery, is another Labrang specialty. Monks cut out colorful silk shapes, stitch them up, and then stuff them with cotton or animal hair. Finally, the individual pieces are attached to a background in a painstaking process to create a three-dimensional effect. The main subject of *duixiu* is Buddhist imagery and religious life.

Special Buddhist activities at Labrang attract numerous tourists from within China and around the world. The Monlam Festival, which begins three days after the start of the Tibetan New Year fea-

tures various colorful ceremonies, including masked dances, displays of butter lamps and the ritual unfurling of an enormous Thangka from a hill facing the monastery on the other side of the Daxia River. There are also various other smaller festivals throughout the year, at which can be seen scripture debates, the lighting of butter lamps and collective blessings and prayer.

The First Bend of the Yellow River

Situated in the southwest of Gannan Autonomous Prefecture, Maqu County (玛曲) is the juncture of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces. The natural pasture there is often described as “the best in Asia.” Every day presents an idyllic picture to the few visitors who venture to this remote part of the world, with herds of cattle and flocks of sheep gazing here and there like white and black pearls scattered on a green rug.

The Yellow River enters Maqu from Mentang, a town in Qinghai Province and flows in a 180-degree arc around the south, east, and north of the county. It is said Yellow River consists of “nine qu eighteen wan” (both *qu* and *wan* mean arc) and Maqu nestles in the first. The river flows gently within the boundaries of Maqu County forming many branches. Maqu grassland is entirely unpolluted, and an ideal resort to escape from the summer heat.

Langmu Monastery

Around 100 kilometers east of Maqu is the renowned Langmu Monastery (郎木寺). The original name of the monastery is Dacang Langmu. In Tibetan, “dacang” means “tiger’s cave,” while “langmu” is “fairy maiden.” In the back yard of the monastery, there is a cave that holds a stone statue, which resembles a fairy. It is said that some 1,200 years ago, a tiger lived in the cave. Buddha Padma-sambhava came to the place and tamed the tiger. From that time on, the place has

been a holy site of Tibetan Buddhism.

Langmu Monastery is well known for the practice of celestial burial, in which the bodies of the dead are dismembered and fed to birds of prey. According to Tibetan Buddhist belief, celestial burial is the most auspicious method of burial, and can help the deceased obtain a good re-birth.

According to tradition, the deceased is stripped, placed in a fetal position and encased in a white cloth. Three days later, a celestial burial master takes charge of the body. First a fire is lit to attract the attention of the birds. Then the body is dismembered with a special knife. The flesh is cut into pieces and the bones crushed and mixed with roast barley, all of which is then fed to the birds.

If the birds refuse to eat someone’s body, it means he or she must have been a vicious person, and will have a bad re-birth. Visitors should not try to intrude on these ritual ceremonies, as the presence of strangers, particularly strangers with cameras, can be deeply offensive and upsetting to the families of the deceased.

Getting there: There are daily flights from Beijing to Lanzhou (兰州). Otherwise train K43 from Beijing Railway Station or T76 from Beijing West Railway Station to Lanzhou costs 210 yuan and takes 24 hours. From Lanzhou, it is a five-hour bus trip to Xiahe (28 yuan), buses depart Lanzhou from the west bus station (兰州汽车西站) daily. There are buses from Xiahe to Maqu (22 yuan). To get to Langmu Monastery, take the Maqu — Diebu (迭部) bus (10 yuan), and get off at the Langmusi stop.

Important reminders: Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is 3,600 – 4,100 meters above sea level, high enough for altitude sickness to be an issue. At night, the temperature can drop dramatically, so make sure you choose a hotel with central heating.

